



# SRI AUROBINDO AND THE FUTURE OF MANKIND



# SRI AUROBINDO AND THE FUTURE OF MANKIND

WITH A FOREWORD

BY

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AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION

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The author makes an attempt towards a critical study of the philosophical and religious teachings of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, a living scholar-mystic of India.

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To  
His Holiness  
SRIMAT SWAMI SHIVANANDAJI MAHARAJ  
The Late President  
Ramkrishna Mission  
and  
Belur Math



## PREFACE

The first two chapters were written as early as 1929, and the book was completed in the course of 1931. But unfortunately it could not be made ready for the press earlier. It is now with much diffidence that I am bringing it out, for it is difficult to write anything on the teachings of one who is not merely a metaphysician, but also a mystic, and far more so, in view of my limited knowledge and comparative inexperience. I have nevertheless made an attempt, in my humble way, towards a critical study of the philosophical and religious teachings of Sri Aurobindo. And it is for the readers to judge how far I have succeeded.

A new book, *The Riddles of the World*, by Sri Aurobindo, has been recently published. I came across it long after my book had been made ready for the press. The book would be very useful as it embodies Aurobindo's very recent views. But so far as I can gather, there is hardly any departure from his fundamental

position as I have tried to outline it. He was a philosopher and is now a Yogi. The contents of Yogic experience cannot be discussed, far less can they be questioned. We are after all in the state of 'The frog in the well,' and we have no right to deny what does not fall within the ken of our ordinary experience. In '*The Riddles of the World*,' as we find, his view of the relation of opposition between intellect and intuition is still very pronounced. There is yet in him a tendency to cry down philosophy as merely an intellectual search which cannot extend beyond the "Valley of the False Glimmer." "It is not by 'thinking out' the entire reality," as he says, "but by a change of consciousness that one can pass from the ignorance to the knowledge—the knowledge by which we become what we know" (R. W., p. 31). The supreme Truth cannot be reached by intellect which merely hovers round it; it is Yogic intuition that possesses it in its fullness. The problem of the relation between intellect and intuition is as ancient as the hills. There are some who seek to make capital out of intuition. It is found to function even in sense-experience, and is also taken to be the

consummation of all human activities. But in its different uses, it betrays an elasticity in its import. Truly speaking, intellect and intuition are artificial creations. When philosophers wrangle over their relation, they after all fight over a false issue. Kant, for instance, speaks of sense as the source of the *manifold*, of understanding as the faculty of categories, of reason as the source of *Ideas* and of intuition as that which furnishes the moral principles. But it is not so natural to get our being in such fourfold division. We can, at best, get only different levels of experience, which are determined by the subject's point of view. We try to analyse out the structure of an experience and generalize its main characteristics and thereby create what is ordinarily known as an organ or a faculty of knowledge. But fixing on any level of experience, it is very difficult to get a faculty of knowledge corresponding to a form of knowledge. One level of experience does not fall apart from another. It is rather the fact that the lower merges into the higher by way of expansion through implication and interpretation. We can broadly distinguish between the commonsense

level, the scientific, the philosophic and the mystic. And all these can be conceived in a hierarchy. Mysticism is ordinarily taken to be a standing reproach upon science and philosophy. Mystics are many, and their experiences often vary. And it is difficult to ascertain who is in possession of Truth. A mystic cannot insist on subjective certainty merely. The contents of such experience are not the creations of subjective fancy. There is after all an objective control. The appropriate conditions being fulfilled, the individual is obliged to experience some novel contents. This is true more or less of all the other levels of experience. Mysticism should not therefore be opposed to philosophy and science. In that case it will rely on a subjective test only and will lose all influence upon human life. Aurobindo himself speaks of different levels even in the mystic zone. There is "a zone which many sadhaks have to cross in which many wander for a long time and out of which a great many never emerge" (R. W., p. 59). So it appears that the notion of adequacy is still appropriate in the mystic realm. It should not therefore be regarded as criminal to scrutinize a mystic. Philosophy as

such has nothing to do with the details of the contents of our commonsense experience, far less is it concerned with those of the mystic one. It is concerned with it as a whole, and it has to determine how far that fits in with the lower levels. But to examine a mystic experience is not to call it down to stand an ordeal before the lower one. It involves the application of a structural principle and a fundamental trend, which control and guide our experience from the lowest stratum to the highest. What controls and guides our experience can be formulated as a logical principle and is expressible in terms of a value which is in short satisfaction. It is, of course, true that mysticism will not find favour with all the schools of philosophy. It is only some schools that will regard it as their crown. Out of all the confusions of the different schools of current philosophy, the problems emerge with baffling freshness, namely, what is philosophy? What is its starting-point? What should be its method of procedure? The answers to these queries have much to do with the determination of the relation between mysticism and philosophy. Bacon taught us rightly that in order to promote scientific investigation, we



should get our minds purged of some *idols* which vitiate our views. But it is surprising to see that science has, in its turn, accumulated some stronger ones which are in many cases interfering with philosophical search. In philosophical speculation, our mind should not only be "ethically neutral" but also be cleared of all *scientific* superstitions. In that case only, we shall be able to determine the respective status of science, philosophy and religion, instead of making science supreme.

In this connection, I like to record my grateful thanks to Sir S. Radhakrishnan, Kt., M.A., D.Litt., who has so kindly taken the trouble of writing the Foreword, and to Dr. A. N. Mukherjee, M.A., Ph.D., I.E.S. (Retired), King George V Professor of Philosophy, Calcutta University, who has kindly written the Introduction. My thanks are also due to Mr. S. B. Das, a relation of mine and to the students of my 5th- and 6th-year Logic classes, who helped me a good deal in correcting the proof-sheets.

CALCUTTA,  
March, 1934.

A. C. D.

## FOREWORD

Among the present-day Indian thinkers, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh is perhaps the most accomplished. His firm grasp of the fundamentals of true philosophy, his earnest attempt at the cultivation of the inner life and his abundant love for humanity and its future, give to his writings a depth and a comprehensiveness which are rarely to be met with. Unfortunately, his writings are mainly confined to the pages of the monthly magazine, *The Arya*, and are not easily accessible. It is therefore with much pleasure that we welcome the appearance of a competent work expounding carefully and accurately the central principles of Sri Aurobindo's creed. Mr. Adhar Chandra Das in the four chapters of his book dealing respectively with (1) Reason and Intuition, (2) The Nature of the Supreme, (3) Religion and Life, and (4) Religion and the Future of Mankind, gives us a sound and clear account of Aurobindo's main views, and points out incidentally that they are based on the central principles of Indian culture. We are all grateful to him for bringing together in a brief and accessible form the main teachings of Aurobindo Ghosh.

S. R.



## INTRODUCTION

Mr. Adhar Chandra Das's book on the Philosophy of Srijut Aurobindo Ghosh has been approved by the Calcutta University for publication. Prof. Das is a very brilliant graduate of our University, and the work which he undertook was one of love and loyalty to this original thinker. He has interwoven into a connected statement the contents of a number of articles contributed by Srijut Aurobindo Ghosh on the true meaning of the Vedanta Philosophy, and has presented his book in a very interesting and attractive garb. In Srijut Aurobindo Ghosh we have the rare synthesis, *viz.*, the assimilation of the best elements of the philosophies of the East and the West. He has moreover realised in his own life the truths of the philosophy which he expounds, and his exposition may be accepted as the sanest interpretation of the Vedanta Philosophy. Prof. Das has rendered a valuable service to the cause of philosophy, and his references to the views of such contemporary thinkers as Bergson, Alexander, and Nietzsche enhance the value of his book.

A. N. MUKHERJEE



# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

	PAGE
The Methods of Knowledge ...	1

## CHAPTER II

The Supreme Being ...	21
-----------------------	----

## CHAPTER III

Religion and Life ...	45
-----------------------	----

## CHAPTER IV

The Future of Mankind ...	83
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# CHAPTER I

## THE METHODS OF KNOWLEDGE

Sri Aurobindo is one of the brightest luminaries in the philosophico-religious firmament of India. He gives us his '*Weltanschauung*' on the basis of the vedantic outlook. His procedure is not only interpretative, but also critical and constructive. It is worth our while to begin our study of Aurobindoism by taking into consideration his attitude towards methods of knowledge.

We are not pure spirits, hovering round in an ethereal realm. We have after all a physico-vital basis of our being. *Prima facie*, it seems, we are detached, in all possible ways, from our environmental conditions. But a little reflection will lead us to realise that we are intimately linked up with our surroundings. Our body, the Tabernacle of the Spirit, transcends and is at the same time continuous with the rest of Nature. The body in its transcendence is so peculiarly constituted that the manifestation of the objective facts of the



world to consciousness is effected through the medium of it. Without the senses the things are devoid of shape, size and colour; the twinkling stars, the blazing sun, the beautiful landscapes, the pretty flowers, all fade away into the utter blank of infernal darkness. That there is an external world or at least the objective facts of experience, we know, on the evidence of the senses. Seeing that the senses play an important part in the constitution of knowledge, some thinkers regarded them as the only sources of knowledge. Others, on the contrary, extolled reason at the expense of the senses. Everyone is conversant with the details of the controversy between the empiricists on the one hand and the rationalists on the other. To trace the history of empiricism and rationalism is not quite relevant to the topic under discussion. But there is no gainsaying the fact that the senses supply the basis on which the super-structure of knowledge is built. The senses confine us merely to what is given here and now. The range of sensible experience is therefore very much limited. The particularities the senses give are insufficient even for the pragmatic conduct of our life. It involves

some sort of generalisation from the given particularities, which in its turn presupposes some organ other than the senses. If there be a divine principle, it cannot certainly be grasped by the senses. As Aurobindo puts it, "we arrive at the conception and at the knowledge of a divine existence, by exceeding the evidence of the senses, and piercing beyond the walls of the physical mind..... The first of these instruments is the pure reason."<sup>1</sup>

According to Aurobindo, human reason has a twofold action, mixed or dependent, pure or sovereign. Its action is mixed when it works under the sway of the senses. "Its mixed action takes place usually when the mind seeks to become aware of the external world."<sup>2</sup> Aurobindo does not maintain a dualism between sense and reason. He seems to suggest, the senses cannot by themselves reveal the external world. The revelation of the spatio-temporal order involves the operation of reason. At this stage reason is not independent but is adapted to the leading of pragmatic life by the manipulation of the sense-data. Its pure action begins when it

<sup>1</sup> 'Arya,' 1915, March, p. 449.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 452.

breaks away from the moorings of sense-life and seeks to come to self-consciousness and to grasp the root principle of the universe. As Aurobindo avers, "Reason, on the other hand, asserts its pure action, when accepting our sensible experiences as a starting point but refusing to be limited by them, it goes behind, judges, works in its own rights, and strives to arrive at general and unalterable concepts, which attach themselves not to the appearances of things, but to that which stands behind their appearances."<sup>3</sup>

Philosophy begins in wonder. Wonder is undoubtedly the awakening of human reason from its slumber in material quiescence. Thus pure action of reason lifts us gradually from the humdrum sort of life to the metaphysical standpoint. The interest in philosophy indicates partial awakening of the human spirit.

Though reason in its pure aspect helps us a good deal towards the Supreme Being, yet it cannot lead us to the cherished goal. It has its own shortcomings. "In reality, all experience is, in its secret nature, knowledge by identity, and its true character is hidden from us because we have

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 450.

separated ourselves from the rest of the world by exclusion, by the distinction of our self as subject, and everything else as object, and we are compelled to develop processes and organs by which we may again enter into communion with all that we have excluded. We have to replace direct knowledge, through conscious identity, by an indirect knowledge which appears to be caused by physical contact and mental sympathy.”<sup>4</sup> Knowledge involves the duality, if not the dualism of subject and object, and the object always falls beyond the subject. So long as we are within the domain of discursive knowledge through reason, we cannot grasp the Supreme Being if there be any in its entirety. We must go beyond the mind and the reason, for “the reason, active in our waking consciousness, is only a mediator between the subconscient, all that we have come from in our evolution upwards, and the Superconscient, all towards which we are impelled by that evolution.”<sup>5</sup> If we are to rise to the Superconscient and to possess it in its fullness, we must transcend reason and develop a mode of knowledge, in

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p 452.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Arya,’ 1915, p. 455.

which the subject-object relation vanishes away in the flash of intuition. As the Superconscient is the supreme Reality, intuition is supreme knowledge. "The foundation of intuitional knowledge is conscious or affective identity between that which knows and that which is known; it is that state of common self-existence in which the knower and the known are one through knowledge." <sup>6</sup>

It is nothing new to read that it is only intuition which is capable of knowledge by identity. Bergson, in modern times, stands as the chief protagonist of intuitionism. His system of philosophy is, after all, an apotheosis of intuition at the expense of intellect. Bergson makes 'time' the essence of Reality; yet, he distinguishes between mathematical time and real time which he calls 'duration' in which past and future do not stretch in a block from behind and before, but past flows into present and present emerges out of future. This 'duration' and the *élan vital* are mutually implied in the sense that one is the essence of the other. The mathematical time is a mere abstraction of 'duration' which intellect carves out for the pragmatic interest of life.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 456.

Mathematical time is spatial, for in it the successive units remain fixed in their places and do not flow into one another as in 'duration.' Thus the ultimate Reality is the *élan vital*,—a vital surge, creative Evolution itself. It is like an explosive shell which breaks itself into fragments which are similarly explosive and which again burst into fragments, and so on and so forth. And this is the way in which evolution proceeds. There is no finality in evolution, no end nor any purpose; for teleology is nothing but "inverted mechanism." Spontaneity is the essence of creative Evolution which is evolving novelties on and on. Now the question arises, if change is the ultimate Reality, how to account for matter and permanence which are given in sensible experience? We do in fact experience stability and spatiality; but how is this permanence which is opposed to the *élan vital* by the whole diameter of being linked up to it? Bergson's answer is that space and time which are the conditions of the existence of matter, are carved out of the vital surge by the intellect which is a mere pragmatic tool to serve the purpose of life and action. Thus matter and intellect are correlative to each other and as

matter is contrasted with the *élan vital*, so intellect is contrasted with intuition. Intellect solidifies the vital surge. It only hovers round the Reality and cannot get into it. It touches merely the fringe and not the core of it. Intellect gives us merely a translation of Reality, which is, as Don Quixote puts it, "like the wrong side of an embroidery, which gives the design and not the beauty." But intuition directly gets into the heart of Reality. It is "intellectual sympathy." It does not apprehend Reality *ab extra* but posits itself into its very essence and knows it as it actually is. The philosophy of Bergson is the vivid expression of the tumultuous life of the western people. In it we find a lurid picture of the civilization and culture of his country and the continent. His metaphysical principle is the symbol of the meaningless strife and struggle of the mad crowds in a frenzied mood. But however it may approximate to the cherished ideal of the occidental civilisation, it can by no means avoid metaphysical bankruptcy. If the ultimate Reality is a vital surge, whence is this matter the essence of which is immobility? The burden is left on intellect which is in fault in distorting Reality and

in solidifying it into the visible spatialised form. But what about intellect? If it is taken to be something external to the *élan vital*, there is a gross dualism which we do not think it worth our while to criticise. Bergson tries to evade the difficulty by tracing the genesis of matter to the nature of the *élan vital*. The *élan vital* is like a splash of fountain, which is resisted and delayed by the falling spray. In the *élan vital* there is a sort of movement of resistance which arrests the spontaneous flow of creative Evolution. And it is due to this that matter originates. But the explanation tampers with the unity of the *élan vital*. We get a dualism of the *élan vital* which is pure change and of movement of resistance which is matter in its potential form. Thus Bergson is in a dilemma; if matter is different from the *élan vital*, there is a dualism. If it is taken to be a negative movement in the *élan vital* itself, the ultimate principle ceases to be pure change and leans towards the Absolute of Hegel, which realizes itself through the mediation of a negative movement within itself. Bergson is really entangled in the meshes of this puzzle, from which he can extricate himself only if he abandons the Heraclitian



trend of thought. If intellect is correlative to the negative movement in the *élan vital* and intuition to the *élan vital* itself, the hiatus between intellect and intuition disappears and intellect becomes the necessary mediation through which intuition realizes itself. Such an interpretation of the relation between intellect and intuition is also justified by his casual effusions. Intuition is sometimes described as a "Fringe and penumbra of intellect." "Dialectic is necessary," says Bergson, "to put intuition to the proof, necessary also in order that intuition should break itself up into concepts and be propagated to other men."<sup>7</sup>

But Bergson's trend of thought is mainly anti-intellectualistic. His fundamental principle and his view of the function of intuition directly contradict any such intimacy between intellect and intuition. He in fact falters and fails to make them associate with each other. Bergson's intuition is like a "shot out of a pistol." He does not show how we can rise from the spatio-temporal order of existence to the intuition of the *élan vital*.

Aurobindo, however, does not drive a wedge between reason and intuition. Intuition is in the

<sup>7</sup> Creative Evolution, p. 251.

subconscient as well as in the Superconscient ~~and~~ is mediated in its upward flight by reason and the mind. "In the subconscient, intuition manifests itself in the action ineffectively and the knowledge or consciousness by identity is either entirely or more or less concealed in the action. In the Superconscient, on the contrary, Light being the law and principle, the intuition manifests itself in its true nature."<sup>8</sup> The subconscient represents the lowest stratum of existence and the Superconscient the highest ; between these two stages, reason and mind act as intermediaries. At the lowest stage, there is no knowledge, for knowledge involves conscious presentation and representation and, for the matter of that, the distinction between knower and known. In the blind activities of material things and in the impulsive movements of the plants knowledge is imprisoned. And reason appears on the field to liberate it from its entanglement. The subject becomes conscious of itself through the mediation of the consciousness of object. But this is only the middle part of our being. The subject attains real knowledge (Knowledge in its true

<sup>8</sup> 'Arya,' 1915, p. 456.

nature is knowledge by identity), as it transcends object-consciousness. It comes to complete self-awareness in which the self is self-revealed in intuition which regains its primacy in and through the operation of reason. Intuition regains its original primacy through the mediation of reason. But what is the exact relation that subsists between reason and intuition ? Are they discrete and antagonistic to each other ? Aurobindo seems to suggest that they stand poles asunder in so far as their intrinsic function is concerned. As he puts it, "Intuition sees things in the whole, in the large and details only as sides of the indivisible whole ; its tendency is towards synthesis and the unity of knowledge. Reason, on the contrary, proceeds by analysis and division and assembles its facts to form a whole, but in the assemblage so formed there are opposites, anomalies, logical incompatibilities and the natural tendency of Reason is to affirm some and negate others which conflict with its chosen conclusions, so that it may form a flawlessly logical system." <sup>9</sup> The tendency of intuition is towards synthesis and the tendency

<sup>9</sup> 'Arya,' 1915, p. 459.

of reason is towards analysis. But we cannot establish the divergent character of intuition and reason by showing that one is the faculty of synthesis and the other of analysis. For synthesis presupposes analysis and *vice versa*. As analysis and synthesis are mutually implied, so intuition and reason cease to be divergent and are found to be essentially linked up. Further, to regard reason as the faculty of analysis is to take a distorted view of its nature as well as its function. Many philosophers took reason as the faculty of synthesis. Kant, for instance, distinguishes between sense, understanding and reason. Understanding is the faculty of concepts and works in the scientific realm. Reason, however, supplies the 'Ideas,' the Ideas of the external world as an unconditioned whole, of self and of Supreme Being, which make our experience self-contained and systematic. Further, reason is the organ of philosophical knowledge. But philosophy cannot pursue a piecemeal process like the special sciences. It is concerned with the ultimate nature of Reality as such. We cannot therefore hope to attain to the adequate conception of Reality by adding together the results of the special sciences. Herbert

Spencer's definition, " Science is partially unified knowledge, philosophy is completely unified knowledge," is to be emphatically denounced. For whatever may be the results of the sciences, the summation of them merely cannot possibly cover the whole universe. So philosophy is not dependent upon the sciences for its departure nor for its procedure. Philosophical knowledge proceeds from one view of the universe to another and in its procedure the different steps are intuitively grasped. Philosophy, of course, does not hang in *vacuo* but begins with the analysis of the facts, given in our experience, and through analysis tends to rise to a synthetic view of the world.

To return to the question of the exact relation between reason and intuition, we find that Aurobindo makes a sharp distinction between them. " It is by an error," says he, " that scholars sometimes speak of great debates or discussions in the Upanishads wherever there is the appearance of a controversy. It is not by discussion, by dialectics, or the use of logical reasoning that it proceeds but by a comparison of intuitions and experiences in which the less luminous gives place to the more comprehensive, more perfect,

more essential. The question asked by one thinker of another is, 'what dost thou know?' not 'what dost thou think?' nor 'at what conclusion has thy reasoning arrived?' Nowhere in the Upanishads do we find any trace of logical reasoning, urged in support of the truths of Vedanta. Intuition, the sages seem to have held, must be corrected by a more perfect intuition, logical reasoning cannot be its judge."<sup>10</sup> In the Upanishads perhaps the true philosophic method is followed. The philosophic method consists in the immanent evolution of our self-conscious being. And in this evolution, the successive steps are intuitively grasped. But it does not in any way prove that reason is excluded by the Upanishadic sages. If they compare their experiences and reject one and accept the other, by what means are the rejection and acceptance effected? If contradictory experiences are held to be the sole guide, all objectivity dwindles away, and subjectivism reigns supreme. We can avoid the catastrophe of pluralism and subjectivism only by invoking the help of reason. "The less perfect intuition must be corrected by a more

<sup>10</sup> 'Arya,' 1915, p. 459.

perfect, but a logical reasoning cannot be its judge." But what is a logical reasoning? Ordinarily logical reasoning is taken to mean a sort of reasoning, involving premises and conclusions; of course when we move in the metaphysical realm, we cannot proceed by means of premises and conclusions. This sort of procedure is helpful in so far as our ordinary pragmatic-life is concerned. But we are not compelled to take the term 'logical' in this narrow import. Logical means after all 'rational' and rational means what is amenable to reason, the innermost essence of our being. We are self-consciousness itself. Sense, reason, intuition are but the modes whereby it comes to its realization. They cannot be arranged as one above another. They are so intimately connected that we may consider their relative prominence at different stages only. Intuition does not merely lie ahead but works also from behind. As Aurobindo himself puts it, "Intuition is our first teacher, intuition always stands veiled behind our mental operations."<sup>11</sup> The statement is pregnant with a suggestion of an

<sup>11</sup> 'Arya,' 1915, p. 457.

intimate connection between reason and intuition but he does not further develop this standpoint.

Now we may raise the question, what is intuitive knowledge ? The most general characteristic that we can fix on, is self-evidence. We regard as intuitive that form of knowledge which is its own evidence. But there are also grades of intuitive knowledge. Even in our sense-experience intuition is involved. The contents of sensible experience are given and are not projected out of our self. The given qua given cannot be doubted. But in sense-intuition there are the knower and the known. The distinction between them however remains implicit till we arrive at the stage of adult experience. Then in inferential knowledge we begin with some datum or data, and pass on to a piece of knowledge on the strength of the datum or data. Let us take, for instance, the reasoning, ' Man is mortal, Ram is a man,  $\therefore$  Ram is mortal.' Here we affirm mortality of Ram and that on the ground that he is a man and man is mortal. If we further analyse, we find that the principle of identity is at the basis of this inference. But if you press further, why do we believe that things identical in essence



must possess identical attributes, the only answer is that we intuit it. 'Ram-mortal' follows from 'Man-mortal' and 'Ram-man' put together by way of intuition. Much of our knowledge, in fact, is derived from intuition, *e.g.*, the knowledge of self, and of the fundamental laws of thought, and so on. But such intuitions are not systematic and are made to serve the purpose of life and action. As we rise above the petty interests of our life, intuition comes to play an important part, for its primacy consists in its disinterestedness. When we rise to the philosophical standpoint, we find intuition stands behind and before. Indeed philosophy begins with the intuition, however dim,—the intuition of Reality and appearance and, for the matter of that, of the principle of contradiction as the guiding light to lead to Reality. Philosophy is no gibe or jabbering talk in a class-room or in a lecture-hall, it is no mere intellectual pastime; it is as we have already indicated the immanent evolution of our conscious being. Our being is not being in the abstract. It is through and through rational. It is reason itself. It begins with a vision which is inarticulate at the outset. It makes it articulate and attains satisfaction for a time. In

the articulation, in the long run, on reflection, anomalies arise. But the nature of reason is such that it cannot rest with inconsistencies. So it pushes on to a new vision and so on, until it arrives at a vision which is self-luminous, beyond articulation, at the same time satisfying. At this stage, reason transforms itself into the Light of a Supreme intuition which reveals Reality in its fullness. In other words, reason attains its full self-realisation passing beyond all strife and struggle. Thus reason and intuition are not two incompatible elements juxtaposed in our being but are really like the two sides of a shield. We may aptly describe intuition as the "fringe and penumbra" of reason. As our eyes see and hands work, so intuition leads and reason executes. "Intuition is liberated from its imprisonment in action by reason." But reason is not like a fulcrum which works *ab extra*. If there is the mediation of reason, it is also, when truly viewed, the expression of the primal intuition. Intuition which is like "a shot out of a pistol," is the monopoly of the mystics. But if it is desirable that it should be in possession of a disciplined self, there should be a system of procedure whereby we

may gradually rise to the state of Beatitude, the fruition of our philosophy. As our reason evolves itself into the Light of the supreme intuition, so our metaphysics attains fulfilment by leading into the plane of the mystics.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE SUPREME BEING

Our ordinary experience is riddled with contradictions. The pressure of our pragmatic life is so heavy that we cannot take cognizance of these contradictions and make attempts towards their reconciliation. From birth to death, we are passing through changes, there is nothing which can be regarded as permanent. Living in the midst of death, we think ourselves to be immortal. But when our near and dear ones die, we cannot but pause and ponder over the meaning of life and the implication of our experience. We for the time being regard the world of existence as an illusion, for when those with whom love, tenderness and affection were reciprocated are no more, and their bodies are reduced to dust, we are quite in the dark about what happens to them on the other side of the grave. The problems press for solution. We develop a sort of apathy towards the earthly life. But this is only momentary. The problems of life, self, immortality seem to be insistent, but

they pass away like dewdrops at sunrise when the tremendous clinging to life reasserts itself and we are restored to the normal state of existence. Some of us however persist in their attempt and try to get at their proper solution. Their soul is partially awakened and on that account they push on. As Aurobindo puts it, "To rest content with an unsolved discord is possible for the practical and more animal part of man, but impossible for his fully awakened mind."<sup>1</sup> Those whose souls are awakened are designated as philosophers and are sometimes strictured as "star-gazers" and dreamers. For in Plato's words, "He that truly keeps his understanding bent on the realities, has no time to look down at the affairs of men."<sup>2</sup> Those whom the problems of life and existence have possessed, go beyond the practical outlook and seem to be useless to the society and the state. The awakening of a human mind however does not necessarily indicate that it has reached its goal. It merely represents just the beginning of its pilgrimage to divine destiny. Search itself is half

<sup>1</sup> 'Arya,' 1914-15, Vol. I, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The Republic of Plato, Lindsay's edition, Bk. VI, p. 219.

truth. The quest after truth and reality brings to light the fact that the human spirit has broken through the walls of "Physical existence," and is trying to come to self-consciousness. The history of philosophy is a huge record of such seekings by truth-intoxicated souls. Divergence amongst philosophers is no accident but a regular phase of philosophising. But one need not be too much overwhelmed by the seeming futility of philosophical search in view of the fact that there is hardly any universal conclusion. So long as we shall cling to philosophizing, difference in our world-views will inevitably ensue, for every one approaches the world-riddles from his own standpoint. His personality and his intellectual power have much to do with his conception of the universe. Despite the differences, the fact remains that in philosophizing the human spirit has after all started on its journey. But, in the case of some, no sooner is it begun than it is finished. Some thinkers proceed with the sense-evidence and remain afterwards rigidly confined to it merely. They are of opinion that there are no other organs of knowledge than the senses which reveal the material existence. Hence we find materialism as a metaphysical

theory. It is useless to reiterate the hackneyed criticism levelled against materialism. Metaphysics is an attempted attitude towards Reality and religion towards life. But religion is very intimately related to metaphysics. According to some, religion is an absolute value and metaphysics is to adapt itself to its needs. Now this view of the relation between religion and metaphysics arrests the genial movement of the human spirit towards Reality. If religion is an absolute value, it is necessarily the presupposition of metaphysics. And metaphysics which stands on a presupposition, must fail to attain to the full view of Reality, for at least there is the presupposition which its scrutiny leaves untouched. On reflection it will be seen that religion is dependent upon metaphysics. Of course, it may be argued that though the ordinary unsophisticated people have no metaphysics of their own, they possess nevertheless religion. But we are not taking religion in its parochial sense but as an attitude towards life with its bearing upon its practical side. And this attitude is determined by belief or unbelief in self, a God-head, future life, heaven and hell, immortality, etc., which is after all metaphysics, an attitude towards Reality. This

attitude is either derived from authority or from some sort of crude independent thinking over the existence and the constitution of the world. We are placed in a novel situation. We are conscious of ourselves but we are not fully conscious. We cannot clearly comprehend who we are, whither we are proceeding, and life cannot be lived without attaining to some sort of solution of these problems however crude it may be. Every man therefore possesses a working philosophy of his own. Every one feels the urge of spirit. But whereas ordinary men stop short and plunge into the activities of pragmatic concern, an awakened soul pushes on until it is satisfied.

But this satisfaction is relative. What is the source of satisfaction to one is the beginning of dissatisfaction to another. Some thinkers remain satisfied on the sense-level and declare matter to be the sole reality. Matter with impenetrability or solidity as its attribute directly contradicts the existence of spirit. Spirit, mind or consciousness is then no reality. It is merely a by-product of matter. But the question that remains to be asked is what is this much-vaunted matter? It is difficult to develop a consistent conception of matter. It



remains, even after much-laboured attempts towards articulation vague and shadowy. As Aurobindo points out, "He (materialist) too ends by positing an unknowable as inert as remote from the known universe as the passive 'purusha' or the silent Atman. It serves no purpose to put off by a vague concession, the inexorable demand of thought or to stand on an excuse for refusing to extend the limits of enquiry."<sup>3</sup> Self-consciousness and God are not things to be revealed by the senses. If they be dismissed as unknowable on that account, matter serves nothing better. As our knowledge develops and experience enlarges, we come to know of other avenues of knowledge than the senses. When we view materialism in the light of our higher knowledge, it ceases to be a satisfying theory of the universe. "A certain kind of Agnosticism," says he, "is the final truth of all knowledge. The more that becomes real to us, the more is it seen to be always beyond defining thought, and beyond formulating expression.....And yet as it is possible to exaggerate with the illusionists the unreality of appearance, so it is possible to exaggerate the

<sup>3</sup> 'Arya,' Vol. I, 1914-15, pp. 4-5.

unknowableness of the unknowable.”<sup>4</sup> If we take sense-evidence as the sole authority, self-consciousness and God are not only unknowable but also unreal. But the knowledge of these entities is not on the same level with that derived through the senses. They are knowable by “the Supreme effort of consciousness.” As materialism stresses matter too much and dismisses spirit, so abstract spiritualism insists too much on pure spirit as the sole reality beyond all change, birth, death and mutation, and declares physical existence as an illusion. The materialism and abstract spiritualism are the two extreme theories of the world. If one is true, the other is false. But if we closely scrutinize, we shall find that both materialism and abstract spiritualism, in their different paths, lead to the same result. They develop the same cramping outlook upon the life and the destiny of the human soul. If matter and, for the matter of that, our physical existence be an illusion, our life, moral and religious, dwindles into nothingness. We do not live in a *vacuo*, we are dependent upon our environments, we have after all a body which is the basis of life and consciousness.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Arya,’ 1914-15, p. 10.

If the body is an illusion, mind or consciousness evaporates into the inane of non-being. We can hardly read any meaning whatsoever into our life. We are then tossed to and fro knowing not the wherefore of our existence. We are then in Bergson's words, "like the pebbles on the sea shore, which know not the waves which brought them there." On the contrary, if everything including what we call spirit is to be explained in terms of matter, our life loses its moral and religious significance. We are not after all like pieces of stone moved this way or that by mechanical forces. We are not mere conglomerations of "myriads of mechanically whirling atoms." We are self-conscious beings. We are real centres of origination. We are not only acted upon, but we also consciously act upon environment. We are not rigidly confined to the present. We remember a past and anticipate a future. In Shelley's words, "We look before and after and pine for what is not." We are in fact being drawn by a triune ideal—intellectual, moral and aesthetic. And if spirit is an illusion, the modes of its expression must necessarily be illusory. Our ideals then, in Dr. Martineau's words, are nothing

but "the self-paintings of the yearning spirit, having no more stability and steadiness than the air-bubbles, gay in the sun-shine, and broken by the passing wind." As Aurobindo himself puts it "Materialism like spiritualistic Monism arrives at a Maya that is, and yet is not.... At the other end, if we stress too much the unreality of the objective world, we arrive, by a different path at similar and still more trenchant conclusions, the fictitious character of the individual ego, the unreality, and purposelessness of human existence, the return to the Non-being, as the sole rational escape from the meaningless tangle of phenomenal life."<sup>5</sup> Now both materialism and abstract spiritualism as attitudes towards reality, have their corresponding attitudes towards life. While the former tends towards gross sensualistic hedonism, the latter takes to rigoristic asceticism. The former takes sense-gratification and the latter flesh-mortification to be their respective *summum bonum* of life. There is however a common point noticeable between materialism and abstract spiritualism. They begin with a strict dualism of matter and spirit. Both materialism and abstract

<sup>5</sup> 'Arya,' 1914, p. 133.

spiritualism overlook the stadia between matter qua matter and self-conscious spirit. It is for this reason that the universe is brought down to the limitation of either mere matter or up to the height of pure spirit. As Aurobindo asserts, "If we refuse to recognise a series of ascending terms between spirit and matter, the two must appear as irreconcilable opponents bound together, in an unhappy wedlock, and their divorce, the one reasonable solution."<sup>6</sup> We cannot at once jump from matter to spirit. As soon as we proceed to the region of the plants, we come across a new phenomenon, namely the phenomenon of growth, which distinguishes life from matter. But matter is not excluded from life. Matter, on the contrary, is the basis of life, but it does not mean in any way that the plant-organism is merely material. It is vitalized by a principle which transforms and transmutes matter qua matter. There are no doubt physico-chemical processes in the plants but they are not independent. They are made to contribute to the maintenance of a principle which works from within. When we come to the sphere of the animals, we find, as the organism

<sup>6</sup> 'Arya,' 1914, pp. 6-7.

develops, a new phenomenon, the phenomenon of consciousness emerges. But there also matter and life enter into the whole in a transformed and transmuted form. The human organism stands highest in so far as our knowledge of Nature is concerned. It involves not only a synthesis of the elements which appear at the previous stages but is also endowed with a new attribute namely self-consciousness. Self-consciousness then does not hang in *vacuo*. It has a body as its basis. And a body, in its turn, is an epitome of the different stages of Nature. But one should not go away with the idea that matter, life, consciousness, self-consciousness are merely juxtaposed or arranged, layer after layer, in order to constitute a human organism. These elements are so intimately connected that we cannot but conceive them to form an organic whole in and through which a fundamental principle realizes itself. Thus when we view things in their true perspective, the hiatus between matter and spirit disappears and Nature appears to be continuous through and through. But the continuity of Nature does not contradict the emergence of real differences. We analyse the facts of Nature

and find that at different stages different phenomena emerge. But in this process of emergence the element of the preceding stage is in a peculiar way involved in the succeeding. Now, in view of this, both materialism and abstract spiritualism appear to be narrow and one-sided. What then will be the satisfactory view of the world ?

According to Aurobindo, the stages from matter to animal consciousness are subconscious, the stage of human life is conscient. Humanity does not represent the apex of Nature. It merely indicates the dawn and not the day. There is however a stage of Nature, real but not existent, into which every human soul is to evolve. That stage is Superconscient. The reality of the Superconscient is indicated by the presence of the triune ideal in the human mind. As each succeeding stage of Nature involves the fundamental elements of the preceding, so the Superconscient will not fall apart from the conscient, and the subconscious but will involve them in a transcended form. The Superconscient is supreme consciousness which is potential at the beginning of Nature, and which is to manifest through the mediation of matter, life, consciousness

and self-consciousness. "We perceive that consciousness and being are not different from each other, but all being is a supreme consciousness, all consciousness is self-existence, eternal in itself, real in itself, real in its work and neither a dream nor an evolution."<sup>7</sup> The Superconscient, supreme consciousness is immutable and "eternally-accomplished." It is beyond all change and movement. "The world lives by '*That*,' *That* does not live by the world." Now if the Superconscient is ultimately real, the world-existence is not an illusion. Some fix on the Vedantic formula, "one without a second," and declares the multiplicity of the phenomenal world to be a mere phantasmagoria. But the Supreme stands beyond unity and multiplicity. We can perceive and conceive a particular thing as one thing only in relation to another. The categories unity, multiplicity have a necessary reference to space and hence cannot be extended to the supreme consciousness. If we at all use unity and multiplicity with reference to the Supreme, we may conceive it to be one-many. It is not a unity which is shut up within the barren fold of

<sup>7</sup> 'Arya,' 1914, p. 135.



abstract identity. But it is a unity which comprehends a multiplicity. If we read the formula 'one without a second,' in the light of another, namely, "All this is Brahman," we find, the Vedanta does not preach illusionism. It, on the contrary, preaches the reality of the existent in the reality of the Supreme Being which is transcendent and at the same time immanent. Aspiration of man towards the Divine points to the presence of the Divine in the human. Though the Divine transcends in a way His creation, yet He embraces eternally His manifestations. If there be creation, it cannot be an event in time. It is not that first God is and then He creates by a fiat of His will. Creation is eternal manifestation. The Supreme is as manifesting in the world of existence. Thus Nature with her different stages is the medium through which it realizes itself. We find then, ("Cosmic consciousness is a meeting place, where matter becomes real to spirit and spirit becomes real to matter." And the dualism between them breaks down.

Now what about the silent inactive Self or Supreme Being? If it is Supreme Being, how can it give rise to the world of tumultuous becoming,

if it is beyond all change and mutation, how can it create a Nature into the bosom of which play multitudinous forces? Aurobindo replies, "The silent and the active Brahman are not different, opposite, and irreconcilable entities, the one denying, the other affirming a cosmic illusion. They are one Brahman in two aspects, positive and negative, and each is necessary to the other."<sup>8</sup> Brahman is not active in our sense of the term. It is conceived as inactive only in order to indicate that it does not act like mechanical forces nor like a conscious will. "The silence does not reject the world, it sustains it." Being is the ground and goal of becoming. Space and time, the two fundamental conditions of physical existence are not merely psychological illusions. They are subjective as well as objective and the spatio-temporal order is at the same time the veil and the medium of manifestation of Brahman. Matter appears to be its complete concealment. It represents the lowest limit of the descent of the Supreme, from which the process of ascent begins. Through the mediation of life, consciousness, the Supreme comes back to self-consciousness,

<sup>8</sup> 'Arya,' 1914, p. 195.

partially in the human consciousness in which the finite is confronted by the Infinite, and where the evergrowing conflict between the finite and the Infinite gives rise to the ideals the realization of which leads to the transcendence of phenomenal existence and to the transfiguration of the human soul. "Every conception of movement carries with it the potentiality of repose, and betrays itself as an activity of some existence." Mere change or movement, cannot be raised to the status of a metaphysical entity. Change in order to be understood must link itself up to something that does not change. Being is then the presupposition of becoming. The pure existent is not merely a psychological concept. It is really the prius of the world-existence. But the pure existence is no blank existence. It is existence-knowledge-bliss absolute, which is in itself in ever-evolving a world-system. It is supreme consciousness which has its dynamism out of the rhythm of which proceeds this eternal creation. It is this conscious force that works in every region of the world. The power of 'chit' is the force of "Creative self-conscience." "Force is inherent in existence, Shiva and Kali, Brahman and Shakti, are one and not

two, who are separable.”<sup>9</sup> The term consciousness is ordinarily taken to denote our mental waking consciousness which we possess during the major part of our existence. When we are deprived of the power of physical sensation by sleep or swoon, we do not cease to be conscious, and this shows that what we call consciousness is merely a partial expression of what extends beyond. It is merely a part of the whole of our mentality. As Aurobindo urges, “We have therefore a right to suppose that there is a Superconscient, a range of conscious faculties, therefore, an organisation of consciousness, which rises high above that psychological stratum, to which we give the name of mentality.”<sup>10</sup>

I may here pause and point out that conscious and subconscient, cannot exhaust our mentality. If subconscient denote what in Nature precedes the evolution of human consciousness, it cannot cover that region of our mentality known in modern psychology as Subconscious. Subconscious and conscious are interdependent. One develops along with the other. In adult

<sup>9</sup> ‘Arya,’ 1915, p. 580.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 584.

experience, 'conscious' contains such contents of 'subconscious' as are called forth by our pragmatic concern. So we can think of the different forms of conscience in a hierarchy. At the bottom the subconscient stands. Conscious and subconscious are intermediaries. According to Aurobindo, the force that is working in Nature is conscious. He cites the authority of an Indian scientist\* in support of his thesis, who is, he says, bringing to light the movements of consciousness in the inframental regions. He speaks of vital as well as physical consciousness. We can discern the working of vital consciousness in the seekings and shrinkings of the plant, in its pleasure and pain, its sleep and wakefulness, and that of physical consciousness in the action and reaction in a metal. "Of course," he says, "it is difficult to understand physical consciousness. But the power of our understanding is not very potent. What we find difficult to understand or imagine we consider it our right to deny. Nevertheless, it is incredible, that there should be this sudden gulf in Nature. Thought has a right to suppose a unity where that unity is confessed by all other classes of

\* Sir Jagadish Bose.

phenomena, and in one class only not denied, but merely more concealed than in others. And if we suppose the unity to be unbroken, we then arrive at the existence of consciousness in all forms of the force which is at work in the world.”<sup>11</sup>

Here Aurobindo seems to be leaning towards pan-psychism. There is nothing like brute inert matter. What we regard as physical is also conscious. Consciousness is not the monopoly of a human being or an animal. Consciousness is detected throughout Nature. Materialism reduces everything to the dead-level of inert matter, so panpsychism drags everything up to the height of consciousness, where the real differences and distinctions between the different stages of Nature disappear. Now we may ask, what is consciousness? The only thing which we know most is our own existence. We know in our case what consciousness is. And when in the ‘seekings and shrinkings of plants,’ we read the workings of consciousness, we are merely extending our self-knowledge to the plant-world. But are the plants conscious in the same sense as we are? There is after all an intrinsic difference between a plant and an animal.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Arya,’ 1915, p 585.

It may be argued that plants also seek and sleep, feel pleasure and pain, and this shows that plants are conscious. Here we should not forget that when we pass from the plane of gross matter to that of plants, we come across a new phenomenon, namely, life, a vital principle, which works in and through an organism. An organism is fundamentally different from a machine. It is a self-sustaining and self-developing whole. It acts and reacts upon its environments, assimilates food from outside, develops and so on. The impulsive actions, 'seekings,' etc., are appropriate to the nature of an organism as such. An organism involves also matter and mechanical forces. But these are not independent. They work under the control of a self-sustaining principle which is the end of the whole. Physical pain and pleasure, of course, involves some physical sensation which in its turn presupposes consciousness. Apart from consciousness, pleasure and pain are mere abstractions. And when we interpret some actions and reactions in plants as pleasure and pain, we are undoubtedly resorting to gross anthropomorphism. Sleep in our case is a gap in our waking consciousness, and we cannot attribute waking consciousness, in

our sense of the term, and, for the matter of that, sleep to the plants. As we have already indicated, a human being has a physico-organic basis. The physical, vital, conscious elements form an organic whole, or in Mr. Lloyd Morgan's phraseology, they appear in a new mode of 'relatedness' on which a distinctive phenomenon, namely, self-consciousness supervenes. By the magnetic touch of this supervenient principle, the elements in the new relatedness are transformed and transmuted. They cannot work independently as they work in their respective spheres. The movements which are conducive and those which are detrimental to the whole at the lower stages of Nature, and the reactionary state of passivity now appear as pleasure, pain and sleep respectively in the light of this new principle. Thus we see, knowing these in our case only, we cannot extend them in any human sense to the infra-animal regions of Nature. But Aurobindo tries to evade the difficulty by investing the term consciousness with an extraordinary meaning. "Necessarily in such a view," says he, "the word consciousness changes its meaning. It is no longer synonymous with mentality but indicates a self-luminous



force of existence of which mentality is a middle term. Below mentality, it sinks into vital and material movements which are for us sub-conscious, above it rises into the supermental which is for us the superconscient.”<sup>12</sup> What Aurobindo has in his mind when he speaks of consciousness as working in the plants, etc., is the Superconscient. The Superconscient is supreme consciousness and can be approached only from the point of view of human consciousness. It cannot be detected by an analysis of a scientist however profound he may be. It cannot be revealed by a machine however subtle it may be. But strange it is that Aurobindo believes in empirical procedure and eulogises an Indian scientist\* who is interpreting some actions in the plants on a human analogy. Nature involves a huge process of development from lower to higher. If we are to interpret Nature as a whole, we cannot have recourse to scientific explanation. We must, as Pringle Pattison points out, adopt teleological explanation which consists in explaining by the last term of the process.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Arya,’ 1915, p. 585.

\* Sir Jagadish Bose.

Human intelligence opens up a vista before us through which we have a glimpse into the principle that is at the bottom of Nature. That principle cannot be at least less than intelligence and being the primal source of Nature, it must be infinite, self-existent and eternal. It is immanent in Nature, and also transcendent. It is '*Sachchidananda*,' supreme consciousness, supreme delight. It is creative joy absolute, out of which, this world-system proceeds. Matter is the first manifestation and also the concealment of the Supreme. The Supreme hides itself by "formulating a veil of physical nature," which by its urge of self-expression is trying to reveal it in higher and higher forms of developments in the course of which human intelligence with its ideas and ideals has been evolved. But Nature has not yet finished her 'gigantic' task which she can accomplish by evolving the Superconscient, through the mediation of human intelligence. So evolution, as Swami Vivekananda points out, "is a complete circle." But it does not mean that the Supreme is in time. It is ever in itself, in its progressive manifestation in the world evolution. Aurobindo, therefore, is needlessly afraid

of a 'sudden gulf in Nature,' for the Supreme supplies the unity and makes for differences in Nature. From the ultimate point of view, there is no difference between one stage and the other. But in so far as the manifestations are concerned, there are intrinsic differences between the different stages of evolution. So if we shun the authority of scientists, and take to the teleological interpretation of the facts of Nature, which is the only legitimate explanation from the philosophic point of view, we shall find that 'the continuity' of Nature is not contradicted by the 'emergence of real differences.'

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## CHAPTER III

### RELIGION AND LIFE

As we have already seen, the Supreme Being is ‘*Sachchidananda*,’ existence-knowledge—bliss absolute out of the rhythm of which the world-system is evolved. The universe and the individuals then are not illusory appearances. They are, in Aurobindo’s words, “the two essential appearances, into which the unknowable descends, and through which it has to be approached.” The descent of the Supreme takes the form of concealment. As matter is the lowest limit of its descent, it is its complete concealment from which a return-movement of ascent begins, and through the mediation of life, mind, it comes to consciousness partially in the human mind. The human is conscient and it is to be evolved into the Superconscient, which is the ground and goal of the world-process. Under the urge of spirit, as the subconscious leads to the conscient, so the conscient will give rise to the Superconscient. The Divine is not antagonistic to the human.

On the contrary, the Divine is realising Himself in and through the world-course. The Divine is immanent in the human. "To fulfil God in life is man's manhood." But this fulfilment cannot be achieved all at once. It will come by way of "progressive comprehension." As we have discussed, in previous chapters, a human being is not a pure spirit moving in an ethereal realm. It has a physico-vital basis of his being. And in order that the fulfilment be integral, the physical, vital and mental must not be rejected but they must be transformed and transmuted by the spiritual. Illusionism does not find favour with Aurobindo. Abstract monism discards the world as a mere illusion, which passes into nothingness at the state of perfection. Perfection is an eternally accomplished fact. The bondage and the process of the soul's struggling out of it are all illusory. Reality is one and is accomplished in itself without any regard whatsoever to many or multiplicity. The soul is in its true nature identical with the Supreme. Its sense of separation is due to nescience and the salvation of the soul consists in realizing its identity with the Absolute. But if the world with its details dwindles into the inane of

nonentity, Aurobindo asks, "Who profits by this escape?" The Supreme cannot profit by the process, for it is taken to be beyond space, time, stress and strife of the world-phantasmagoria. It is only by "partial logic" that we make the rigid distinction between the one and the many, the finite and the Infinite, the Absolute and the relative. It is undoubtedly true that the Absolute, which is merely transcendent, cannot be characterized even as one, for one is abstract and nothing in itself. It is intelligible only in relation to many. But the Absolute ceases to be Absolute, if it is posited over against the relative. Creation in fact is the crux of all philosophy. Philosophers struggled with it and suggested it to be an event in time. But the age of arid theology is gone. Human thought has emancipated itself, to a great extent, from its self-made limitations. There is however an attempt to explain away creation altogether. Aurobindo is not an extremist. His thought is not ruled by any partisan spirit. He pronounces what he feels in his inner illumination. In his view, the world with its contents is not an illusion, but an appearance which not merely hides the Supreme but withal reveals it. It has come into

existence by way of the manifestation of the Absolute. "If Brahman has entered into form and represented its being in material substance," as he says, "it can only be to enjoy self-manifestation, in the figures of relative and phenomenal consciousness."<sup>1</sup> The Supreme by its Maya makes a scheme of itself in the multiplicity of the universe. It establishes itself in the threefold grade of the subconscient, the conscient and the Superconscient. The material or physical Nature is the Maya objectified. It appears as the veil of the Absolute, which is partially lifted through the mediation of life and mind. Matter is the lowest limit of the descent. But the process of ascent does not proceed abruptly. Distinctive successive stages are necessitated. What appears as mechanical action in material things, appears as impulse in the realm of life, and mind in the conscious world. Through the human mind the veil is pierced, and there is opened up a vista whereby we can probe into the Real in the background and get a glimpse into its nature. The finite centres of consciousness in the form of human minds are evolved as the necessary mediation through which the process

<sup>1</sup> 'Arya,' December, 1914, p. 260.

of ascent is effected. But the human mind is not the topmost step in the ladder. It indicates merely the middle point. It has yet to evolve itself into the Superconscient which is the end of the process.

The human personality, in the ordinary empirical life, works in ignorance which proceeds from its ego-sense. In our surface life, we make a sharp division between ourselves on the one hand and the universe on the other. We think, we are pure externals to the world and work upon it *ab extra*. We are ever under the delusion that we are real agents and real centres of origination, we are ends in ourselves and to us the world at large is adapted. We are impressed with the sense of imperfection in the world and we arrogate to ourselves the right and the power of moulding and building it anew. In this way, in our limitations, we fall away from the totality, universal and Absolute which not only transcends all but also embraces it. The limitations that we impose are self-defeated. They involve in themselves the principle of their negation, for they are not the conditions of truth but of falsehood. They are not the props of illumination but propellers of mere ignorance. We seek to confine ourselves to the ego-created



cleft. But we in our deeper nature are too big for it to be contained. We are not satisfied with our surroundings. Our desire is not only a builder but also a destroyer. Our ego erects a structure wherein it takes shelter. But our deeper nature leads us up to leave it behind. We are thus choosing one course after another. And the process appears to be a never-ending one, for the Divine within us makes us break through all bounds. Contentment which is not the 'coping stone' on the structure of spiritual life, is material quiescence in disguise. It betrays our affinity not with spirit but with matter. We are far more than matter and hence we are ever under an urge to push beyond. One seized with discontent is the man before whom glimmers the distant goal. The principle of transcendence is at work in him. He steps on the track which if pursued properly leads him to the promised land. As Aurobindo himself puts it, "He is the greatest of living beings because he is the most discontented, because he feels most the pressure of limitation. He alone perhaps is capable of being seized by the divine frenzy for a remote ideal."<sup>2</sup> Discontent is divine. It chastens

<sup>2</sup> 'Arya,' 1914, p. 326.

our soul and cheers it up towards expansion. It prepares us for the play of divine dynamism.

The ego owes its being to the limitation of the universal 'I.' It lives in abstraction and cannot take account of all that works behind and fails to grasp its unity with the rest of the universe. The individual centres of consciousness are not mere excrescences on the universe. They are evolved as the means whereby the Idea manifests. In the human mind, in its sense of finitude, imperfection, in its aspiration towards the triune ideal, the Divine has come to partial consciousness. But the infinite wealth of His being is yet to be revealed. The full revelation of the Supreme involves the liberation of the individual souls by way of higher evolution. But liberation does in no way indicate that the individuals are lost for ever. It is not that they disappear in the abstract unity of an indeterminate being. In the words of Aurobindo, "The liberation of the individual soul is the keynote of the definitive divine action; it is the primary divine necessity, and the pivot on which all else turns."<sup>3</sup> The individual souls are not then lost in the abyss of an indeterminate being.

<sup>3</sup> 'Arya,' 1914, p. 265.

They are merely transformed and transmuted. In the mundane life, the individual lives by the ego. But the liberated soul transcends its "personal conscience," and is informed by what appears to us as Superconscient. It then becomes conscious of its unity with the Supreme as well as with the totality of the universe. It is not that its very existence is annulled, but only its attitude is affected. "The liberated soul extends its perception of unity horizontally as well as vertically. Its unity with the transcendent one is incomplete without its unity with the cosmic many."<sup>4</sup> The liberated soul lives on a level wherefrom it views things *sub specie æternitatis*. Death is then nothing more than a change. Sorrows and sufferings lose their poignant sting and appear to be veritable spurs that keep us alive to the drawing of the Divine. Its consciousness then points in the twofold way. On the one hand, it is conscious of its unity with the Supreme and on the other hand, it is conscious of itself and the world-course as the means of its manifestation. As Aurobindo puts it "Since the conscious manifestation of the transcendent in the individual,

<sup>4</sup> 'Arya,' 1914, p. 265.

is the means by which the collective, the universal is also become conscious of itself, the continuation of the illumined individual in the action of the world is an imperative need of the world-play.''<sup>5</sup>

But this state of beatitude is not easily to be achieved. There is no shortcut to this supreme goal. We cannot attain it through physical culture nor by intellectual acumen, it cannot be a mere conception in mind. It must be a possession in life. Theoretical grasp is only a precondition of this possession. If there be no intellectual grasp of the ground of the universe, an attempt to possess it in practice is out of the question. But mere philosophic knowledge is not sufficient. Philosophic penetration depends upon reflection. But reflection is not co-extensive with life. Belief apart from practice is barren. As Aurobindo himself affirms, "Philosophy is the intellectual search for the fundamental truth of things, religion is the attempt to make the truth dynamic in the soul of man. They are essential to each other; a religion that is not the expression of philosophic truth degenerates into superstition and

<sup>5</sup> 'Arya,' 1914, p. 263.

obscurantism, and a philosophy which does not dynamise itself with the religious spirit is a barren light, for it cannot get itself practised.' ' 6

Philosophy is then an intellectual grasp of the truth of the universe and religion an attempt to translate it into practice in life. Religion is a practical discipline. We should however make a distinction between social religion and the personal one. Social religion relates to the temporary leavening of the soul, whereas personal religion aims at the inner development and eventually at the liberation of the individual. But personal religion is not on that score merely a private one. Religion as a definite form of discipline may be pursued by different persons even at the same time. The form of religion depends on our *weltanschauung* at large. If we are convinced that the world is ruled by many gods and goddesses, each independent and equally powerful, our religion will involve an attitude to propitiate them, so that they may promote our good in life. Our life as such stands supreme. And even religion is taken as a means to it. But if we reduce the multiplicity of godheads to unity, our attitude is not of

6 ' Ideal and Progress,' p. 67.

course so affected ; for the one may figure before us as an autocrat. If the world-creator is conceived on the analogy of the human father, who creates and sustains the things and the beings, loves them and makes provision for their life, our attitude will be one of reverence, adoration and love. But here too God is a mere means to our life. Perhaps an average human being, in his upward flight towards divine life, passes through several levels of religion. And when the aspirant ascends to the stage at which the secret of the world-course is partially revealed to his intellectual intuition and at which he can feel in the heart of his hearts that he himself and other details of the universe are merely the means of the manifestation of a spiritual principle, his religion will then appear as a value which is not subservient to anything sordid ; it is not a mere appendage to life : it is the climax of human consciousness in which is revealed the meaning of life. God is then the end of the universe and life the pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Now the whole thing hinges upon the nature of the discipline the main objective of which is to make fixed the flash that passes before the intellect.

In a sense, a human being is the epitome of the world, for in him the fundamentals of the different stadia of evolution are conserved, of course, not in a confused way. They undergo transformation in the process in the emergent whole. In the human being between the conscious, the living and the physical, there are no air-tight compartments. They in their way constitute one organic whole of which they are merely aspects. The human organism is endowed with life and assimilates the physical as food and in its complex subtleties, supplies the occasion for the emergence of consciousness. Now in spiritual life in which the transformation of the human is the pivotal point, it is quite likely to emphasize one aspect of it and to neglect the others. Especially in India where for ages exploration into the spiritual realm was undertaken and is still being continued by many, the diverse aspects of our nature were experimented upon and different paths of discipline developed.

‘Hatha-yoga,’ a kind of yogic discipline, fixes upon the body and its functionings. Its main concern is our gross physical basis. Indeed the demands of the body are many. The whole host

of human beings are smarting under the burden of flesh. We are striving from birth to death to satisfy our thirst, hunger, and other carnal cravings. There are moreover diseases and deformities. They render ourselves incapable of anything higher in many ways. The body itself appears as a veritable clog that keeps us down for long. It is therefore not surprising that some sought to control it wholly and thereby developed an independent discipline. The main defect of this discipline is that it abstracts from other higher aspects of our being. By some yogic processes, we may acquire immense control over our breath and over the vital functions of the limbs. The full mastery over the physiological processes of the body may open before us a new vista ; in virtue of it, some occult powers may accrue to us, whereby we may resist the onrush of the forces of Nature upon us and keep our body calm. But mere occultism is no index of spiritualism. Further this Hatha-yogic discipline involves departure from our ordinary normal life, for it is to be pursued and practised under the guidance of an expert under strictly restricted conditions. We therefore need not wonder when at it Aurobindo looks askance.



The three paths of devotion, knowledge and work attempt an abstraction in another way. Of course, the starting-point is on a higher plane than that of Hatha-yoga. Each of these concerns itself with our conscious being. But it does not centre round the whole of it. It merely selects an aspect of it and seeks by its "conversion" to rise to the state of supreme bliss. Thus the path of devotion fixes upon heart, the path of knowledge upon intellect and the path of work upon will as the pivotal point. Our emotions and impulses are turned round from their empirical workings and are directed towards the Divine. We feel, God is the supreme Lord. He is the being of our being, the only beloved to be loved. Worship and devotion are merely the means whereby our emotional life is transformed and transmuted and raised to a level at which we experience our kinship with God in an ecstasy.

The path of knowledge also aims at the realization of the supreme state and it relies upon intellectual reflection. This path coincides with philosophic search which begins with the analysis of our experience. It takes one order of being after another and reflects over its reality or other-

wise. On a close scrutiny, the empirical reveals its self-contradictory character and the intellect proceeds by negating the contradictory. In this way, by the method of '*neti*,' '*neti*,' a sort of destructive criticism, "This path as ordinarily followed leads to the rejection of the phenomenal world from the consciousness as an illusion." The soul is plunged into the Supreme without any return. But as Aurobindo criticises it, "This exclusive consummation is not the sole or inevitable result of the path of knowledge, for followed more largely and with a less individual aim, the method of knowledge may lead to an active conquest of the cosmic existence"<sup>7</sup> The most important question to be asked in this connection is whether mere philosophic knowledge is sufficient for spiritual uplift. By intellectual reflection, we may attain to a world-view but that may remain a mere comprehension and may not contribute anything to the working of our practical life. The path of knowledge nevertheless is not useless. It does some spade-work which may stir up our spiritual fervour. Philosophic knowledge is a sort of

<sup>7</sup> 'Arya,' Vol. II, p. 247.

groundwork which supplies the basis on which is built the superstructure of religious life.

“Karma-yoga,” or the path of work also aims at the same goal. The karma-yogin proceeds by dedicating every egoistic activity to the divine will. This path too as ordinarily followed involves artificial abstraction, for there is nothing like will in itself in separation from other aspects of our being. Apart from thought will is blind and apart from feeling it is like a clogged machine. Further the usual practice of this path aspires to abstraction in the extreme, but here too the inevitable exclusion of the phenomenal world is not necessarily the result.

The three paths in ordinary practice share the same defect as Hatha-yoga. They involve arid abstraction and aims at exclusive absorption. But if we look at them in their true perspective, we shall find that all opposition between them breaks down. The three paths in the ultimate analysis are one. One involves the other two. Love of the Divine at its perfect stage leads to perfect knowledge and directs to divine service. Thus the path of love turns out to be one of knowledge and work also. If we actually grasp by our intellect

the supreme reality of God, we cannot be so 'tough-minded' as not to love Him and our intellectual knowledge is barren, if we do not see God in everything and everything in God and dedicate all our activities to Him as their supreme source. Thus the path of knowledge is also a path of love and work. Without love the path of work is like a "blind alley" that closes upon itself and without knowledge it is based on a *vacuo*. Truly speaking, the dedication of all our work presupposes some amount of knowledge of the Supreme, which in its turn supplies a solid background of intensely emotional life. Thus the path of work is also a path of knowledge and love.

'Raja-yoga' takes a higher point of view than Hatha-yoga and is in a sense less defective than the three paths of love, knowledge and work. It does not fix upon the body but seeks to perfect the whole structure of our mental being. It tries to control our "emotional and sensational life," and acquire "the mastery over the whole apparatus of thought and consciousness." Its main concern is to calm down our conscious being in its manifold phases, so that the divine light may flash upon it. There are several preliminary steps

in this process. A strict self-discipline is needed. It insists on purity internal and external, purity in thought, work and deed. One pursuing this path should by all means practise non-violence, constant contemplation, continence, etc. It does not entangle itself in the complexities of Hatha-yoga but yet turns its method to its use. It draws upon the powerful dynamism of its methods to discipline the body and to control its vital functioning and for the rousing up of the slumbering supernatural faculty called *Kundalini* in yogic terminology. All this being accomplished, the bodily system becomes perfectly peaceful and the mind is no more troubled by the trammels of the body and the surge of the sense-life. It soars up through the concentration of its force, and passing through some stages, finally ascends the plane where it enjoys its unity with the Supreme in a state of *Samādhi*. But this path too good in itself is not entirely free from some fault. It aims at 'supernatural perfection,' and involves in fact abrogation of our normal course of life. "The weakness of the system," as Aurobindo puts it, "lies in its excessive reliance on abnormal states of trance. It tends to withdraw into a secondary

plane, at the back of our normal experience, instead of descending and possessing our whole experience.”<sup>8</sup>

In Ramkrishna, the sage of Dakshineswar, we come across a “colossal spiritual capacity.” He did not pause and ponder over this path or that. His whole being darted forth straight to the Divine and after realization, came down, seized one yogic method after another and showed by practice the substance of each. But such an example of spiritual dynamism is an exceptional one and cannot be brought on the level of average human life. Ramkrishna stands as the landmark in the history of humanity. He shines there as the beacon light showing the path ahead to the benighted mankind. In Aurobindo’s words, “Such an example cannot be generalized. Its object also was special and temporal, to exemplify in the great and decisive experience of a master-soul, the truth now most necessary to humanity, towards which our world, long-divided into jarring sects and schools, is with difficulty labouring, that all sects are forms and fragments of a single integral truth and all disciplines labour in

<sup>8</sup> ‘Arya,’ Vol. II, p. 246.

their different ways towards one supreme experience.”<sup>9</sup> An ordinary human being cannot march up straight and seize the citadel of divine life all at once. He has to undergo a strict and laborious discipline which is to transform his empirical being. We have just considered the several paths as ordinarily followed and have found them each defective. Though Aurobindo discards each of these in its rigidity, he does not reject them absolutely. He is quite alive to the valuable elements in each. He therefore proceeds to reconstruct a method of self-discipline which is synthetic in outlook and is in tune with the trend of our normal life.

There is nothing obscure about Yoga which, taken broadly, is “a methodised effort towards self-perfection, by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent existence.” Nature herself is engaged in a vast yoga. There is a *nisus* in Nature to evolve. But the effort she makes is unconscious. She struggles on to pierce the film of matter and thus to recover her primal being and to reveal her

<sup>9</sup> ‘Arya,’ Vol. II, pp. 303-04.

potentialities. She labours with the evolution of life and mind, and it is in the human mind that she for the first time devises means whereby her yoga may become conscious, thus shortening her race and making sure the result. But the human mind does not automatically become conscious of the yoga of Nature, that is working behind. It in its ordinary life is entangled in the "ego-centric predicament." It is only when the universal within it asserts itself and pushes it up out of this pass, that it becomes conscious of the end for the realization of which it is evolved as a means. Then the yoga of Nature is no longer unconscious or subconscious. It is at this stage a conscious systematic effort the human mind makes to transcend the tangled life of the ego, and to realize its unity with the One. But the whole thing hinges upon the nature of the yoga, and it is not out of place to press for the what and the how of the process for the purpose.

The aim of yoga is the liberation of the individual out of the ego-created catastrophe. He in virtue of the discipline is to transcend his lower nature. But this transcendence implies mere transformation and not wholesale rejection. We have



seen that Nature in her evolution has miraculously mustered the fundamentals of each preceding stage in the succeeding. In the human being matter and life are included. But there we cannot discern them as we find them in their rigid realm. They underwent necessary transformation before they could be taken as the fit elements of the newly-evolved whole. Now this principle of conservation through transformation will not be transgressed in Nature's higher evolution. So in our spiritual development, our lower nature is simply transmuted. In Aurobindo's words, "The passage from the lower to the higher nature is the aim of yoga. And this passage may effect itself by the rejection of the lower and escape to the higher,—the ordinary point of view,—or by the transformation of the lower and its elevation to the higher nature. It is this rather that must be the aim of an integral yoga."<sup>10</sup> The body is the basis of our being. Our perfection will be incomplete without perfecting it. The synthetic yoga professes to attain to the perfection of the body and the mind. But it avoids the complexity and abnormality of the Hatha-yoga and the Raja-yoga. It

<sup>10</sup> 'Arya,' Vol. II, p. 307.

nevertheless comprehends their crucial principles in its formulation. There are in fact three conditions of the integral yoga, namely, God, Soul and Nature. The yoga presupposes the soul in bondage, God, the supreme Reality, appears as the ideal in the process, which draws the soul up out of the sense-life, and Nature is the *surrounding* environment of the soul, the basis of its empirical existence and the means for the manifestation of its higher being. We in our ignorance make sharp divisions between matter, mind and spirit. Thus in these divisions, a choice lies before us between physical existence, and mental and spiritual. The majority of us are muffled up in the material veil. We are given to a life of eating, drinking and merrymaking. It is only a few who live the life of the mind. In them only the human is operating. But we have not attained to the highest, being engrossed in the intellect. Mind is not the last term of evolution. It is not an end in itself. It merely points to the middle course. It is yet to evolve into a stage beyond. The yogin should not fly away from the life, the given. He is not to depart from the physical and the mental but he is to 'divinise' them by the spiritual. He ought to aim at emancipation

not partial but complete, at absolute freedom that will accrue to him in virtue of "unbroken contact" of the individual being in all its parts with the Divine. *Sāyujya Mukti* is a stage of liberation at which the individual comes much near the Supreme Being; and in this emancipation, it enjoys unalloyed bliss. But this state tempting in itself is not sufficient. *Sālokya Mukti* marks a stage at which the whole conscious being of the liberated enjoys the same status of being in the form of *Sachchidananda*, existence-knowledge-bliss absolute. But this state great in itself cannot be the final goal of the individual. It is *Sādharmya Mukti* which appears as the apex of the spiritual structure. This is the state of the soul's ultimate expansion, in which the yogin acquires divine nature by transforming the lower being into "the human image of the Divine." He experiences his unity with the one being both in the world and beyond it. He is purged of egoism and personal conscience. He nevertheless becomes a conscious channel through which divine activity pours upon the world.

There are some aids which are of great efficacy in the process of yoga. They are *shāstra*, *utsāha*,

## RELIGION AND LIFE

*guru* and *kāla*. *Shāstra* is 'knowledge of the principles that govern the realization,' *utsāha* is the 'force of personal effort,' *guru* is the teacher and *kāla* is time. In aviation, exploration and in other adventures, the pioneers are the persons who find the path. They bear most of the stress and strife of the struggle. But they turn to account the lesson they learn from their experience. They generalize and formulate principles of procedure which are recorded in the form of a literature which turns out to be a real possession of the ardent aspirants. Now what is true of enterprises in the phenomenal realm is true with a greater force in the spiritual sphere. It is an invisible world that sustains the visible. It is only the seers who therefore can bring message to men. *Shāstra* is the record of their endeavour and experience. One bent on the yogic discipline will do well to fall back upon it for guidance and light. The *sādhaka* then is to rely on *utsāha* or personal effort. He cannot afford to be indifferent. If he is dissatisfied with the normal course of life, it is incumbent on him to make an endeavour himself to transcend it. A human being is not like a lump of clay to be moulded in this way or that.

There is no physical fulcrum whereby he may be lifted out of the mire of mundane life into which he is sunken. He is a conscious being. Any transformation of his lower being presupposes his personal effort. Of course, ultimately it is the Supreme which is working in the process of transformation. It is the source out of which all activity flows forth. But knowledge of this ubiquitous working is the goal of the sādḥaka. Until this illumination comes, he is to continue his effort to effect the dedication of his whole being to the Divine.

The true teacher is the transcendent Being which is the Goal of integral yoga. But it is very difficult for men to believe in something unseen and intangible. They can only adumbrate it by an abstraction which exerts no influence upon their life. For spiritual progress, they need a living perfection by which they may profit. They require a "human representation" of the Supreme, which may work as the veritable dynamo to demolish the stronghold of the ego and its impulses. Persons self-taught in any of the arts or sciences are few and far between. An average human being needs the help of a teacher

in any of the academic and intellectual cultures. It is therefore no wonder that the sādḥaka cannot proceed along the unknown spiritual path without the assistance and influence of one who has already traversed it. Shāstra being a record of the experiences of the past masters is only a partial expression of the infinite knowledge, for everything cannot be recorded as it is revealed. For definite guidance and driving force, the aspiring soul demands a human being who is the image of the eternal upon whom the Divine has descended with light. Of course, in the spiritual process there are honourable exceptions. It may happen that the individual enters into divine life without any extraneous aids. The life of Ramkrishna is a case in point. His whole being soars up to the supreme state by a genial flight. Realization being complete, he comes down, fixes upon the different paths and with the help and guidance of the respective gurus, experiences their rapid results. This he does only to inculcate a lesson upon mankind. As Aurobindo himself puts it, "Ramkrishna having attained by his own internal effort the central illumination, accepted several teachers in the different paths of yoga, but

always showed in the manner and the swiftness of his realisation that this acceptance was a concession to the general rule by which effective knowledge must be received as by a disciple from a guru.”<sup>11</sup> Though spiritual discipline demands a guru or teacher, there is no reason why it should lead to sectarianism or fanaticism. Sectarianism is an offshoot of ignorance. In it the soul is still enmeshed in the ego. A parochial religion is “pooled self-esteem.” From the standpoint of integral yoga, the choice of a guru is to be made not on a principle of exclusion but for enlightenment. It is in itself a synthetic doctrine around which there can develop no dogma.

Time is the remaining aid. Ordinarily it appears as a formidable enemy that retards our progress. The effort we make is personal and the gap between the ideation of the end and its actualization needs our sustained endeavour. Present is ever recurring and future is ever-receding. Present is with us and future is yet to be. It is time, in its threefold phase, that creates a chasm between our longings and their fulfilment. But this is only the commonsense point of

<sup>11</sup> ‘Arya,’ Vol. II, p. 365.

view and is vitiated by personal colouring of our aims and ambitions. If we take a view of time in its true perspective, its alleged hideousness is annulled. If we view it not from the point of view of the ego but from that of Eternity, we shall find that it is the necessary mediation through which the world-play is being performed. In Aurobindo's words, "When the divine working and the personal are combined in our consciousness, it appears as a medium and a condition, when the two become one, it appears as a servant and an instrument."<sup>12</sup> So the sādḥaka need not feel troubled with time, for it is a help and no hindrance. It is the condition of his progress. His ideal attitude then is one of persistence and patience.

The sādḥaka should not fly away from the normal surroundings in which his life is found and seek shelter in caves or jungles. Spiritual illumination will ensue not by way of rejection of our normal course, but in virtue of its transformation. But we should not be under the delusion that this transformation itself will be effected by the Divine. It is undoubtedly true that it is the Supreme which is the

<sup>12</sup> Arya, Vol. II, p. 377.



sādhaka as well as the sādhanā. It is the sole cause of all activity of the universe. But we can come to this cognizance only in a state of transcendental experience which is the avowed object of yoga. So long as we cling to our personality and carry on with our ego, we cannot in any way dispense with our personal effort. We must be sincere. We cannot play fast and loose with the Supreme. In ordinary course, we are ever conscious of ourselves as independent doers. And mere saying that we are mere instruments is ineffective. It will work as a powerful force, if it is in the possession of the soul. As Aurobindo says, "In yoga also it is the Divine who is the Sādhaka and the Sādhanā; it is his Shakti with her light, power, knowledge, consciousness, Ānanda, acting upon the ādhāra and, when it is opened to her, pouring into it with these divine forces that make the sādhanā possible. But so long as the lower nature is active the personal effort of the Sādhaka remains necessary." <sup>13</sup>

Two things are necessary for the fulfilment of our endeavour, personal effort of the aspirant and Grace of the Divine. The Divine is the whole

<sup>13</sup> 'The Mother,' pp. 10-11.

truth of the world. He is not merely transcendent but also immanent. So even in the functionings of the phenomenal realm He is active. But here He works by the ego in His yoga-māyā. Indeed from the ultimate point of view, the path of perfection is the path of His progressive revelation. The sādḥaka can progress only in proportion as the Divine descends. This descent is no physical fall. Grace is no ordinarily-given favour. "The supreme Grace will act only in the conditions of the Light and the Truth; it will not act in conditions laid upon it by the Falsehood and Ignorance. For if it were to yield to the demands of the Falsehood it would defeat its own purpose."<sup>14</sup> The sādḥaka shall not then invoke the Grace of God by saying some verbal prayers, for there is in fact no person to be pleased by them. It is to be sought by a sustained effort to loosen from the environs of the ego. The whole of our being—physical, vital and mental—must be surrendered to the Supreme. The surrender must be sincere and complete. We cannot keep any part in abeyance. There must be an "exclusive self-opening" to the Divine. If we

<sup>14</sup> 'The Mother,' p. 2.

open ourselves on one side and allow enemies on the other, it is idle to expect that the divine Grace will descend within us. Personal effort is to involve aspiration, rejection and surrender. We are to be seized with a burning zeal for the desired end. We are not to be tied down to the demands of the emotions and impulses. We have to lever up our lower nature and not to leave it behind altogether. It is imperative to induce every aspect of our being to submit to divine working. The body is to be turned into a temple in which the Eternal may be installed. As in the human organism the physical *qua* physical, the vital *qua* vital are hardly discernible, so in our spiritual development the body will cease to be a body, as ordinarily it is, the mind will cease to be a mind as it is in its normal working. They will be so transmuted as to become a servant of the soul. But it is not our portion to mould them into the new form. We have simply to turn round from the tedious course of the tangled life of the ego through rejection and to make surrender, solid and sincere. It is the Transcendent that will effect the transformation. We must "keep the temple clean,"

so that the Divine may come down and abide with us. Surrender is not to be confused with indifference. It is not a state of passivity but one of puissance. It brings forth into requisition the whole fund of energy of the individual. It needs a more Herculean effort than that of Hannibal in crossing the Alps, far greater courage and strenuousness than those of a conqueror. Indifference is *tāmasic* surrender. It shrinks from the conditions the fulfilment of which is the precondition of the divine descent. "Note that a *tāmasic* surrender, refusing to fulfil the conditions and calling on God to do everything, and save one all the trouble and struggle, is a deception and does not lead to freedom and perfection."<sup>15</sup> The ego by itself cannot set up the process of transformation. It by its effort merely prepares the field. But there is no temporal gap between the surrender by the soul and the transformation by the Transcendent. Both proceed *pari passu*. They are in fact the two sides of the same process. "The second begins in part before the first is completed." The individual becomes conscious of divine working within him in

<sup>15</sup> 'The Mother,' p.14.

proportion to his surrender. As soon as his surrender is integral, his whole being blooms forth into divine efflorescence.

Concentration is the primal condition of yoga. But the integral yoga does not fix upon the thought or the emotion or the will in their abstraction. It should be consecration of all the parts of our being. Even our physical basis is not to be banished from the process. The body in fact will be the base of the spiritual structure, the mind its middle part and the yoga will furnish the pinnacle that will penetrate into the plane of the Divine. "Yoga, therefore, would not be possible except for the very few, if the knowledge of the reason were its first condition."<sup>16</sup> If metaphysical knowledge is taken to be the pre-condition of this path, then only some intellectuals are eligible for it. And it will cease to be synthetic. \ The integrality of yoga will include all the elements of our being but not necessarily in their equal development. It cannot neglect nature. It too turns to account the temperament. One may approach with emotion or intellect or will according to tempera-

<sup>16</sup> 'Arya,' Vol. II, p. 439.

ment and the path of yoga is pronounced to be one of love, of knowledge, of work, in accordance with the preponderance of any of these, but the individual thereby does not discard the rest. The attempt to dedicate will and to 'divinise' emotion presupposes the conviction as to the spiritual end of existence. We may come to it through reason by personal reflection or it may be through faith an acquisition. But in either case, thought is the sustaining ground. It is quite likely that thought or knowledge at the outset is inadequate. But it is of no importance, for knowledge however inadequate has a great working value inasmuch as it undoubtedly fixes on the first principle.

Egoism in itself is intelligible. But altruism for altruism's sake is senseless. In a sense, altruism is egoism only in its magnified form. We ordinarily love our wife, children, friends and relatives or country and other creatures, not for their sake but because they are in connection with the ego. But this path is not the path of liberation but one of entanglement. The ego by this course will be gathering an immense force. The integral yoga need not

abrogate the ordinary relations. In it they are approached only with a different attitude. Human love then foregoes its label of flesh and appears to be the innate aspiration towards God, the driving force beneath our individuality and the universe. Patriotism is found on a higher platform. It then ceases to be a source of party strife and appears as the partial expression of the perennial and all-embracing love. The problem of salvation is not to be solved in the depth of the seas or on the height of the hills. There is no demand to dislodge the individual from the normal state of his being. He may however withdraw from the world, for a period only as a temporary measure, so that he may gather force and return with a newer vigour.

Aurobindo seems to be of opinion that the integral yoga that he propounds will free the spiritual discipline from its usual complexity and break down its narrow limits. It will undoubtedly simplify a good deal the situation. The Sannyasins are to be recognized not by their outward insignia but by their inner growth. We ought not to be befooled by outer form. We

should judge by and keep our eye on the innermost core. But can this yoga admit of a general use ? "All things excellent," says Spinoza, "are as difficult as they are rare." The majority of mankind are in a sleeping swoon. It is only a few who arise, awake and attempt an enterprise. The synthetic yoga indeed precludes the possibility of any strife, for it is a discipline and not a religion in particular. The dedication of our all to the Divine depends upon some amount of energizing of our thought. So it presupposes a measure of intellectual culture in the individual, inborn or acquired. As the religion of love without a philosophic background is turned into one of laxity, superstition and obscurantism, so this yogic discipline, lacking a keen intellectual insight and losing the dynamic influence of an illumined soul, will tend to degenerate into a resting place of lethargy and into a life of indifference. There will be retardation and no progress. The conscious yoga of the individual will then sink back into the unconscious yoga of Nature. But it is no fault of the discipline itself. The defect develops only out of the shortcomings of the individual. If we



are sincere and strive to discipline our self in the light of the fundamental truth of the universe, we shall find that religion cannot be set apart from life, that our whole life is yoga, an offering to God and a sacrifice.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE FUTURE OF MANKIND

The concept of evolution is a special gift of the nineteenth century. With its advent, the intellectuals rose to a new angle of vision. It was in fact influencing every department of knowledge, scientific and otherwise. But it was not equally welcome in all quarters. The protagonists of 'special creation' entered against it an emphatic protest. The principle of evolution indeed led to a revolution in the philosophico-theological world. Some were up against it, while many others came to be engaged in reshuffling and reinterpreting the philosophical doctrines and the religious dogmas. Experience is more potent than imagination. So the human intellect had to adopt the newfangled notion and made of it many applications. The theory of evolution as originally propounded was not concerned with the whole world. It was some outsiders who made an extensive use of it inasmuch as they tried to explain by it not only

the biological phenomena but the whole field of Nature. The theologians' extracosmic creator, creating out of some coeval primitive matter, was discarded altogether; and attention was directed towards some primal being, out of which the things and the beings of the world were supposed to have developed in the process of some immanent movement and modification. Materialism received an impetus from the implication of evolution and the authority of science. Matter, in an undifferentiated and homogeneous state, was installed as the ultimate reality out of which everything, not even excluding life and consciousness, came into being. The critics of materialism are many. They can only vilify it but cannot look into its virtue. Extreme idealism in philosophy and abstract spiritualism in religion did not recognize its reality. They discarded it as an enigma or an illusion. The only reality is mind and its states. So we are to confine solely to our mental life and labour for its leavening. Aurobindo keeps an open mind. He does not approach materialism along the beaten track. He turns his attention more to its method than to its message. According to him, materialism develops

out of our first view of things, to which the secret differences in the bosom of Nature are not divulged. Materialism indeed takes a distorted view of things by driving them to one dead level. But its teaching involves an element of truth, which is of an enduring importance to mankind. It fixes upon the vast existent, and finds the truth that matter at any stage of Nature is not expunged. But it omits to envisage the fact that at the higher stages of evolution, matter is not involved in its unmodified primal purity. But despite its defects, it did great service to men in as much as it brought forth to the forefront the fact that matter is the physical basis of our being. In Aurobindo's words, "The intellectual force of materialism comes from its response to a universal truth of existence. Our dominant opinions have always two forces behind them, a need of our nature and a truth of universal existence, from which the need arises. We have the material and vital needs, because life in matter is our actual basis, the earthward turn of our minds, because earth is and was intended to be the foundation here for the workings of the spirit."<sup>1</sup> We should not be deluded

<sup>1</sup> Evolution, p. 42.

into thinking that the "first visage of universal existence" reveals the final truth. We have to persist and pursue the path of penetration, pierce the veil of physical being, and to draw out the full import of existence. It is indeed true that the theory of naturalistic evolution cannot nurture a spirit of hope, nor can it furnish a principle for progress. Human life then is an excrescence on the earth. Its birth is due to the dance of atoms and unto them it returns at the time of dissolution. Progress is confused with change from the less complex to the more complex. Thus materialistic evolution negates the notion of evolution itself, for evolution is more than mere change. But we have to recognize three things of permanent value out of the endeavours of the atheistic ages. First, the physical world is no illusion. Secondly, the worldly life is no accident but is worth living. Thirdly, in our search into the secrets of Nature, we should not be in a hurry: we ought to be realistic in outlook, and stick to a scientific method to the operation of which Nature will bare her bosom.

Materialism, even as fermented under the force of the notion of evolution, could not point to any

*raison d'être* for the dignity of human life. In its professed creed, there is contained no cardinal principle for progress nor any force that may ensue in the form of freshness in outlook. In its over-emphasis on the physical, it came to ignore the other aspects of existence, and this rendered it rigid and confined it to a narrow region. In modern times, materialism is sought to be superseded by some extreme forms of evolutionism. We shall do well by noticing some of them by the way; for the position of Aurobindo will stand out clear by way of comparison and contrast. Bergson broaches the theme of creative Evolution. Time, in his opinion, is the essence of Reality. It is not that Reality is the changeless which changes. The changeless is not intelligible even in a logical abstraction. The principle of change itself is raised to the status of a metaphysical entity. Thus the *élan vital* is creative Evolution itself. The scheme of creation is not mechanistic, nor is it teleological. It proceeds out of the spontaneous flow of the *élan vital*. There is not only one direction of its driving, but the number of its directions is in fact indefinite. The human beings are brought into existence by

an act of chance, and they may cease to exist in future; for their being is not in any way implied in the *élan vital*. We are then in a constant dread, 'lying palpitating' as it were, 'within the jaws of a devouring monster.' We are in the dark about the depths out of which we have sprung up and also about the destiny to which we are damned. We appear to be mere bubbles on the vital surge of Evolution, only to be broken in no time. The human existence like the physical, is in a complete breaking away from the primal being which is to be intuited as a colossal becoming. They are a veritable bar to the vision of the supreme Surge. They are to be abrogated altogether in order that the primal intuition of the *élan vital* may automatically ensue. Thus Bergson, in his fetishism of progress, lays too much emphasis on the principle of change and creates a chasm between change and the changeless. But there may be a point of view from which the changeless is not contrasted to change and from which the two may be actually synthesised. Bergson in his insistence on the *élan vital* comes to the same catastrophe as abstract spiritualism. In his philosophy, the physical world is an

aberration from creative Evolution. There is no guarantee for its fixity nor is there given a dignity to it. Hence human life, which is possible only in a physical environment, is found to lose much of its significance. There is no room for religion, and if there be any, it must be a mere makeshift. Of course, he attaches an intrinsic value to the intuition of the *élan vital*, but he cannot point out the reason why we should aspire to it. For Aurobindo too evolution stands for progress. But progress then is no mere change. It is not even intelligible apart from a plan. But this plan is not temporal. It is the urge of divine realization. Evolution is a process in time. But it is not itself the Reality. Time is not nevertheless neglected as an illusion. It is the necessary mediation through which the Eternal is manifested. The process of evolution has a serene source out of which it proceeds, and a profound end it is yet to achieve. In a sense, there is a difference between the ground and the goal. But ultimately the two are one. What is involved in the beginning will appear in the end. Evolution therefore takes a linear course and avoids all aimless wanderings. It begins with a complete



concealment of what is working behind, and proceeds by its gradual cancellation. Matter, according to Bergson, is immobile. It is therefore opposed to the principle of change. It is, of course, brought into being in the course of evolution. But consistently speaking, the *élan vital* has no justification for its emergence. According to Aurobindo, matter is a veritable veil. And Nature under the pressure of her potentialities, has pierced it through by evolving life and consciousness. Matter then does not appear as an ineliminable surd in the scheme of creation. It supplies the basis for greater becomings. It is made a means of the manifestation of the Supreme Being. Nature was so long merely groping in the dark. She was making an unconscious and unilluminated effort. She was nevertheless being prompted by a divine impulse. In the human mind, she has evolved a conscious means which may speed up the process. Human existence is not an insignificant episode. It is the central thing of the empirical world, for it affords an avenue through which we can approach the fundamental truth of things. But it is no gross anthropomorphism to envisage the world through the human mind. Anthropomor-

phism ensues upon the imposition of everything sordid,—our egoistic desires and feelings—upon the world. If we keep out the *idola*, eliminate egoistic interference, and fix upon the primary function and ponder over the place of the human mind in world, we come to cognize its importance. “Man is Nature’s great term of transition,” says Aurobindo, “in which she grows conscious of her aim; in him she looks up from the animal with open eyes towards her divine ideal.”<sup>2</sup>

But this ideal is no figment of our imagination. Ideal is ordinarily taken as opposed to actual. It has, on the face of it, an air of ‘*yet to be.*’ So it is all apart from actual. It is undoubtedly true that an ideal, when actual, ceases to be an ideal. But there is no sense in saying that an ideal to be an ideal should never be actual. An ideal, ever-receding and never to be received within the ken of human existence, is a chimera. “Man, limited, yearns to the infinite; relative, is attracted in all things towards their absolute; artificial in nature, drives towards a higher ease, mastery and naturalness, that must for ever be denied to her inconscient forces and half-conscient animals; full of

<sup>2</sup> The Superman, p. 9.

discords, he insists upon harmony, possessed by Nature and to her enslaved, is yet convinced of his mission to possess and master her.''<sup>3</sup> Imperfect and limited as we are, we are striving to transcend the state of finitude and imperfection. Our aspirations towards the ideal is not the evanescent yearnings of the spirit. In them we are in touch with the deeper nature of our being and the fundamental truth of things.

But it is possible to emphasize the proximate ideals at the expense of the ultimate. Some form of evolutionism fixes upon the emergent and dispenses altogether with any ultimate end. Prof. Alexander takes space-time continuum as the stuff, out of which everything of this world is evolved. He is at one with Bergson in discarding anything permanent at the back of the universe. Space-time is also described as pure motion\* which is prior to the generation of matter. Evolution proceeds under an immanent urge in this ultimate stuff. At different stages, new qualities are emerging. Thus matter, life, and mind have come into being. Mind is as yet the highest product

<sup>3</sup> The Superman, p. 9.

\* *Vide* Preface, Space, Time and Deity.

of evolution, but it is not its terminus. At each stage of evolution, there is an urge towards the next. So even in mind the restlessness of time has not a bit abated. The whole universe is tending to a stage ahead at which a fundamentally new quality, namely, deity different in kind from mind will emerge.

Now apparently there seems to be much on which Aurobindo may find himself on all fours with Alexander. But if we undertake a patient search, we shall find that the thoughts of these thinkers diverge on the most important points. Alexander takes space-time as the ultimate stuff, out of which everything is derived. This space-time is in essence identical with Bergson's *élan vital*. The philosophy of both Alexander and Bergson is an apotheosis of change or motion. Their zeal for spontaneity has bestowed a splendour upon their speculation at the expense of a keen logical insight. They are not to be denounced for their antipathy to anything permanent, which could be the source of the world. But we may try to impress upon them the imperfection of their principle in as much as they cannot thereby explain the why and the wherefore of the

emergents in evolution. Alexander, of course, speaks of a *nisus* in space-time, which is an urge to develop. This notion of *nisus* is pregnant with a suggestion which may be worked out in such a manner as to show that space-time with a *nisus* is far more than mere pure mechanical motion. But as the matter stands, Aurobindo does not dispense with space-time as mere subjective categories nor does he hail them as the supreme source of all existents. How the matrix of space-time can work wonders in the emergence of life and consciousness which are not in any way implied therein, will appear as an enigma to Aurobindo. He may, however, go with Alexander in so far as the line and the mode of evolution within a certain range are concerned. But he will have reason to part company in view of the ground and the goal of evolution. According to him, what is working in evolution is far greater than matter, life and even than mind. It is only being progressively revealed in these. The human mind is the central thing in the empirical world. So we have to approach our world-view through the human existence.<sup>1</sup> Evolution is a process in time. But it is not one of mere change.

There is a passage from the less developed to the more developed. Development is indeed not to be conceived in the terms of mere complexity. It is intelligible only in view of the emergents which stand apart by the whole diameter of being. But this difference does not make for discontinuity. The significance of evolution as a process is not revealed at the beginning. We can read the meaning of the process only in the last term as yet evolved. Alexander in fact fixes upon the first evolute, indulges in an ethereal abstraction of space-time, which are the fundamental conditions of physical existence, and places them together as a metaphysical principle that works at the root of evolution. But he fails to furnish them with potentialities which can explain the emergence of matter, life and consciousness. Aurobindo's approach however is different. He gets in behind the veil through the human mind and intuits what is operating in evolution. What is at the back of the evolutionary process, is to be conceived in the light of consciousness. But it is not to be wholly identified with it. Human consciousness is only a faint flash of the effulgence that illuminates the whole process of evolution. It

is, as Aurobindo himself terms it, Superconscient. It is not inert matter nor is it mechanical force or motion. It is consciousness supreme, out of the delight of which the creation proceeds.

“A merely material universe,” says Alexander, “would not be exhausted by materiality and its lower empirical qualities; there would still be that restless movement of time, which is not the mere turning of a squirrel in its cage, but the *nisus* towards a higher birth.”<sup>4</sup> Alexander’s evolution is not a mere change but a change from the lower to the higher and these do not stand on the same level of being. Matter, life and mind have as yet been evolved. And there is the *nisus* towards a next, which is conceived by Alexander as Deity. On the face of the thing, it may seem that Deity indicates the same state of existence as implied by Aurobindo’s life divine. But truly speaking, their differences are deep-seated. The Deity of Alexander is no infinite being. It is an empirical quality yet to be evolved in future. When it will be evolved, there will be individuals possessing this quality. We cannot now know Deity in its actual nature. But we can adumbrate it in our imagination, in the light of the

<sup>4</sup> Space, Time and Deity, Vol. II, p. 348.

as yet emergent qualities. Mind can "contemplate" all that is lower to it, but it can only "enjoy" its own existence. So there is the tendency to a stage ahead, at which creatures will come up with the angelic quality Deity which will enable them to contemplate minds, and these angelic beings will be finite in nature. Mind and Deity will differ not in degree but in kind.

Now it is to be noted that the notion of Deity is too vague and indefinite. This much we know that it will be an empirical quality like matter, life and mind. Alexander, however, does not confine the use of the term Deity solely to the stage ahead. He further generalizes its meaning. Every succeeding stage appears as Deity to the preceding. Thus the term is rendered elastic in its use and it loses all its technical import. In the *nisus* in the world and, for the matter of that, in the human mind, Alexander perhaps intuits an important truth which he conceives under the limitations of his philosophical theory. If there is restlessness in the universe, it is the movement of space-time. There is to be posited no other infinite being even immanent in order to explain evolution. There is no actual God possessing



Deity. God is merely the physical universe as tending to Deity. In the scheme of Alexander's creation, the human beings cannot be given a privileged place. There are mere emergents, and their being is not necessitated by anything inherent in evolution. Their ideas and ideals do not afford an insight into the ground of evolution nor are they any indication whatsoever as to its avowed object. If there is progress, it is for the world, and ultimately of 'space-time'. The progress of mankind in politics, economics, art, literature and in other spheres seems to be left indifferent to the fundamental trend of the universe. Alexander by identifying God with the physical world as tending to Deity, is merely making a concession to our religious sentiment. Religion is an accident of human nature and is not impregnated with an interpretation of Reality at the back of the universe. The ineffable '*yet-to-be*' is a veritable enigma. The scientists' awe and admiration at the mysterious Nature is no substitute for religious faith and fervour. Alexander stands for progress which consists in ever pushing ahead. But it will, as it appears from his account, never come to a finish of the process. Humanity itself is its

goal. For the future of mankind, we have to look up horizontally and not vertically.

To Aurobindo, however, evolution is not for the sake of evolution. It is simply a means to a supreme end which is being progressively realized in and through it. The physical Nature was in travail for a higher birth, for she was pregnant with a spiritual principle which she made a strenuous effort to deliver. Her endeavour was all unconscious. She, under the urge of the spirit hidden within her womb, has brought forth matter, life and mind into being. In the human mind, she has for the first time become conscious of her end. In human consciousness, the Divine—the driving force in Nature, only partially divulges His secrets. Human existence is a manifest contradiction, and attempts are being made in manifold ways to cancel it. We are conscious of our finitude and imperfection. We are withal, dissatisfied with our condition, trying to transcend the tangled mass of empirical existence. There is in us a feeling for progress but it is not the movement of our physical nature nor is it the *nisus* of space-time, but it is the urge of spirit supreme with which we are identical in our deeper nature.

“Progress is the very heart of the significance of human life,” says Aurobindo, “for it means our evolution into greater and richer being.”<sup>5</sup> To realize God in life is the end of human existence. So Deity may be taken to mean divine existence to which we are aspiring. But it will not be an empirical quality, nor strictly speaking, an emergent, for the emergents are the means whereby ascent to the highest height is effected. In inconscient Nature, the processes of evolution were unconscious. With the emergence of the human organism and the human mind, there is to be a fundamental change in the procedure. The human beings are being prompted in many ways by the impulse to a higher birth. They are conscious creatures. They are therefore not to be lifted up like dead matter. They can attain their divine birth only by a conscious and methodized endeavour. Divine life will ensue by way of the enlargement of human existence. But this enlargement will not be physical expansion. It will be effected through transcendence and transformation of our lower nature. We have to gradually gather up our being in its pristine purity, delivering it.

<sup>5</sup> Evolution, p. 35.

from the dross accumulated upon it by the ego,—our empirical personality. Humanity has to be transmuted into divinity. We have to rise to the status of supermen, to the state of “man’s integral self-transcendence.”

The ideal of supermanhood is no new theme to us. It is already in the air. Superman too lives in the imagination of the novelists and flourishes in the prophetic vision of the scientists. But Aurobindo’s superman is not self-sufficient in either of the ways. He is richer in his nature and fuller in his stature. He does not kick at the customs and conventions of social life. He rises, not by sinking below humanity, but by transcending it. He is not one who assails physical Nature by scientific implements; nor does he control her forces by mechanics and machineries. He does not aim at outer command but at inner conquest. He is not to lessen his labour by scientific appliances. He is to stem the tide of the tumult of empirical life by reducing the claim of the ego to the minimum, and by placing his being as the channel of divine puissance. Scientific knowledge in itself is no hindrance. It appears as a positive evil, if it be made subservient not to God in man but to the

brute in him. In modern times, the triumph of mankind over their environs is indeed indicated by their scientific inventions. But all these are brought in to bear upon the life of the ego. They are the veritable instruments whereby the place of a person is protected and the prestige of a people is preserved. The mighty egos of the different nations of the world are fattening on the labours of the physicists and the chemists, the mechanists and the engineers. We can anticipate an era,—some have actually anticipated it—when an articulate system of scientific appliances will be evolved to reduce physical labour to a vanishing point. Men will appear as the sole masters within their home and without. They have already learnt to swim in waters like the fishes, and to fly in the sky like the birds. They will undoubtedly work out further details in many ways. But all these outer improvements will not lead to any inner illuminations, for they all range round the ego which appears as a porous pall over the potentiality of the human nature. Aurobindo therefore sounds a warning. He speaks not only out of his philosophic conviction, but also from his spiritual experience. He insists, in order that civilization is not damned, in order

to prevent its approach towards a devouring doom, that our whole outlook of life must be changed. We have to recognize the truth of things and the end of our existence and to adapt our all to promote it.

Nietzsche is an apostle of supermanhood. He declared in his own way the mighty possibility before mankind. He, by his "rare gleaming intuitions" grasped a profound truth. But he presented it in a poor and hazy manner. "Nietzsche was an apostle," says Aurobindo, "who never entirely understood his own message. His prophetic style was like that of the Delphic oracles, which spoke constantly the word of truth, but turned it into untruth in the mind of the hearer. Not always indeed; for sometimes he rose beyond his personal temperament and individual mind, his European inheritance and environment, his revolt against the Christ-idea, his war against current moral values and spoke out the word, as he had heard it, the truth as he had seen it, bare, luminous, impersonal, and therefore flawless and imperishable."<sup>6</sup> He is not satisfied with the existing status of man. Man has to be surpassed by

<sup>6</sup> The Superman, p. 2.

superman who is the 'meaning of the earth. Human existence is only a 'bridge' and not the goal. Will to power is the central thing of the world. God or a spiritual principle which is supposed to be working in the universe, is a mere conjecture born out of fear. "All Gods are poet-symbolisations, poet sophistications." <sup>7</sup> The world is not an illusion. It is only the sick who reject it. The bodily existence, and, for the matter of that, our physical life is real. The ego is no enigma. It is the core of our being, which is to grow by acquiring power. It cannot be abrogated in our endeavour towards our higher birth. For all developments will accrue by way of the energizing of the ego, in overcoming difficulties that deter us from the onward march. Each of us is in our deeper nature a will to power and we can approach the full stature of our being by acquiring greater and greater control over the environments. Everyone is for himself. Common good is a chimera. It contradicts itself. The individuals are to proceed not by cōoperation, but by competition. Their procedure will not involve the play of pity or sympathy. They will count upon clash

<sup>7</sup> Thus Spake Zarathustra, p. 153.

and conflict, for everyone is to aim at ~~man~~ which allows no mediocrity. We are to begin with our ego as a veritable reality and proceed by developing our instincts and impulses, freeing ourselves from the fetters of morbid traditions, moping religion and malign social conventions.

Religion is an old sentiment which prevails only in subjective fancy. It does not afford an insight into anything profound in human nature nor in the universe. It is an offshoot of weakness and is no indication of inner strength. "The preponderance of pain over pleasure is the cause of that fictitious morality and religion: but any such preponderance furnishes the formula for decadence."<sup>8</sup> A religion, in which prayers are offered and worship is directed to a Godhead who is a creature of fancy, is a religion of the weak. Those who are to step beyond mere man have to discard such a sickly sentimentalism. They ought not to extend their imagination beyond their egoistic existence. They have to develop selfishness in sundry ways. "The noble soul accepts the fact of his egoism without

<sup>8</sup> The Anti-Christ, p. 142, ap. 15.



question and also without consciousness of harshness.”<sup>9</sup> Sacrifice is the watchword of all religions. It is insisted that the highest good is to be attained through sacrifice,—sacrifice of our egoistic, animal nature to the universal and rational. But all this is a mere humbug. Sacrifice does not elevate, but it leads us down. It does not foster the growth of the ego. It does rather cripple it. Christianity, with an articulate system of moralistic teachings, has made for a formidable barrier which has to be broken as the *sine quâ non* of progress. We have to get rid of the theological instinct and dispel all hallucinations, social or otherwise. For guidance and light, we are not to look abroad but keep at home and follow the dictates of the ego. Voluptuousness, passion for power and selfishness are to be valued most. We are to become hard and horrid. Religious emotion has to be erased altogether, for it is responsible for the sacrifice of ‘all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of spirit.’ It has confined mankind to a state of stagnation. A sustained effort has to be made to get out of this entanglement. The first step towards that will

<sup>9</sup> Beyond Good and Evil, p. 241.

be to cast off the cramping weight of old customs and traditions.

Morality is another shackle which has to be shivered to pieces. It is a fabrication of the fellows who are cowed by the consideration of fear. "Man must become better and eviler. The evillest is necessary for the superman's best."<sup>10</sup>

Pity, sympathy and fellow-feeling which together are taken to constitute the milk of human nature are to be ruled out of court; for they are not the means which make for the mastery at which the superman is to aim. The so-called noble feelings stunt the growth of our being inasmuch as they cover under their gaudy form a veritable deformity. These are the support of the weak and cannot afford sustenance to the stronger. The superman has to go beyond the slave-morality of the mediocre man and be governed by the principles of "master-morality" which cannot be cast into the moulds of right and wrong, good and evil. "The good and the evil are an old illusion," and without dispelling it outright, supermanhood cannot dawn upon this earth. Christianity is a 'religion of pity.' It has, by its teachings, encouraged

<sup>10</sup> Thus Spake Zarathustra, p. 353.

everything weak and low. It has, by its dogma of original sin, given a perverted view of the human nature. It constantly harps on this fault in man and thus hampers his flight to greater heights. Good, good in itself is a grandiloquent concept, and 'Kant became an idiot' in propounding it. Duty for duty's sake is nonsensical, for the ego cannot be reduced to a mere automaton of duty. Personal promptings, and individualistic aims must influence the emergence of everything great and splendid. But the way to supermanhood is not a primrose path of ease and enjoyment merely. It too follows the course of sorrows and sufferings. The superman is a bold spirit ever pushing ahead, never daunted by anything. He aspires to the goal at the height of which the distinctions between good and evil are gone, and there prevails a mastery which ensues out of absolute independence.

Now in Nietzsche's theory of supermanhood, despite its defects, we can perceive a profound truth. He seems to be ever conscious of an immense possibility before mankind. But he only very dimly intuits it and grossly gave an expression to it. Aurobindo\* will go a long way with

him on the point that the possibility cannot be realized at the level of moral life nor can it be actualized by a mere expansion of moral nature and by religious dogmas. But he will find reason enough to differ from him in other details. Nothing appears so obnoxious to Nietzsche as Christianity. He is up against its moralistic outlook and cries down its creed of original sin. Leibnitz's philosophical doctrine of *materia prima*, an element of passivity in a Monad, which can never be eradicated by individual effort, is the replica of the religious dogma of original sin. The Grace of God is to be invoked by repentance and prayer for the final enlightenment. "Truth to tell," says he, "there never was more than one Christian, and he died on the cross."<sup>11</sup> "Jesus himself had done away with the concept of guilt—he denied any gulf between God and man; he lived this unity between God and man, it was this that constituted his 'glad tidings.'"<sup>12</sup> From all this it appears that Nietzsche is not a hater of true Christianity but that he hails with pleasure the message of the Messiah. It is only

<sup>11</sup> The Anti-Christ, p. 178.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 183.

Churchianity against which he wages a war. But it is difficult to say that he is a believer in religion, for God, in any form, does not fit in with his scheme of things. It is also on many occasions emphatically denounced as an illusion. But in his protest against asceticism embedded in the fundamental teachings of Christianity, its parochial outlook and pernicious dogma of original sin, he dimly perceives Light which soon becomes clouded by his personal cravings.

The superman of Aurobindo will undoubtedly possess power. But in a sense, it is a misnomer, for when one will conceive power in connection with the superman, it will retain, even in an attenuated form, its empirical association. Indeed the superman will be a self-ruler and a world-ruler. But the type is not a Napoleon nor a Nelson. There will be mastery—this is power spiritual—manifest in the poise the individual will possess, unperturbed by anything. Merely physical categories are inapplicable, for the individual rises through the transformation of his ego and his physical existence.

Like Nietzsche, Aurobindo does not proceed by rejecting religion and moral life. He does not

fix on the ego as the core of our being and erect an ideal which is to be achieved by its enlargement. The individual, for his higher birth, has to extricate himself out of the welter of the ego, for it is the ego which acts as the barrier that prevents divine flowing into his being. Religion is no hallucination. It is a phenomenon through which we can penetrate and probe into the fundamental drift of the universe. In religious consciousness and aspiration, the human beings have brought to the forefront the significance of their life, the end of their existence and of the universe. Morality is no mania. By it is not maimed the nature of mankind. Some have held ethical life and institutions responsible for the stoppage of organic development in man. "Biologically speaking," says Dr. Schiller, "man has ceased to be a progressive species long ago."<sup>1 2</sup> But this is no accident nor an aberration. It has come to pass as a necessity. In the evolution of the human body with its immensely complex nervous organization, Nature has invented a conscious means whereby her purpose can be effectively achieved. The world-creation, the

<sup>1 2</sup> Tantalus or the Future of Man, p. 20.

process of evolution is no pantomimic show run for the bare edification of a person, and in which biological novelties are to be brought forth on and on, *ad infinitum*. The world-evolution has a definite plan which is only partially revealed in the human mind. The body has come to be the basis of a consciousness which can adumbrate ideals and envisage existence in its universal import. Thus the world appears as the manifestation of a master principle which is the ground as well as the goal of evolution, and it is half-revealed in man who in his finitude is confronted by the Infinite. The superman will achieve the end, for he will receive the full revelation of Reality. Further, biological development is unnecessary, for the human organism is that in which biological evolution has been consummated. And the end is to be attained by the "efforts of consciousness." Morality and, for the matter of that, ethical institutions are not mere side-issues of the world-evolution. They are, on the contrary, some of the central things in the latest evolute. The urge of spirit or *Sachchidananda* is all-pervading. It works also in the transition from the non-ethical to the ethical. In

Aurobindo's words, "The world has three layers, infra-ethical, ethical and supra-ethical."<sup>14</sup> The physical Nature is not ethical. The activities therein are fixed habits that determine the occurrence of events. Good and bad, right and wrong are irrelevant, for there is no centre of consciousness with reference to which they are intelligible. In the infra-human region, the animal world, consciousness appears in some form. But there is only a play of the feelings of pleasure and pain, which are not so much articulated as good and evil. Man is a conscious being. He is conscious of himself as an end, and adopts things from the surroundings for his satisfaction. "Man desires self-expression." The self that he seeks to realize, is no particular self in its rigid particularity. This self is empirically personal, but potentially universal. The end he endeavours to achieve is not purely private. It is at once private and public. But all this is not consciously grasped at the beginning. This is brought to light by reflection upon human history. Society and, for the matter of that, the ethical institutions

<sup>14</sup> Arya, 1915, p. 648.



have come into existence, not by way of contracts among the primitive men made for convenience. They are no accidents in human evolution. They have in fact been necessitated by what lies deepest in our nature. It is the same necessity as in Nature, that works in the ethical sphere. There is therefore no reason why moral life should be levelled down. It is in itself a necessary mediation through which the supreme end is approaching its fulfilment. But it is only a step and is in itself no end. It is no absolute value. It is of value only as a means. In Aurobindo's words, "Ethics is a stage in evolution. That which is common to all stages is the urge of *Sachchidananda* towards self-expression."<sup>15</sup> "To lose the link of Nature's moral evolution is a capital fault in the apostle (Nietzsche) of supermanhood."<sup>16</sup> Superman will not spurn at moral life. He will not cease to be moral in the sense that he will sink down to the level of non-ethical brute life. He will recognize its value in so far as it goes, but will not allow himself to be tied down within its

<sup>15</sup> Arya, 1915, p. 647.

<sup>16</sup> Arya, Vol. II, p. 571 (*vide* the type of the superman).

narrow bounds. He will transcend moral codes and ethical categories by way of a higher development. He will be beyond morality but not below it. He will stand on a plane on which moral life will find its fulfilment. The superman will be supra-ethical.

Thus Aurobindo's superman is no Titan but a human Godhead. He is not the concentration of the entire physical power of the world. He is a veritable dynamo of spiritual forces. He enjoys his identity with the Divine, the essence of the universe, and in this enjoyment without personal conscience becomes a channel of Divine activity pouring upon the world. Supermanship is no special privilege of a class. It is no spiritual aristocracy to be enjoyed by a few. It is the birthright of all. It is the drift of our being as human. Now a very important question suggests itself. Will the individuals attain to supermanship separately or collectively? From the fundamental position of Aurobindo, it should follow that supermen by themselves will not form a species over against men, as men form one against any group of the lower beings. 'Species' is a biological term, and it has its biological associations.

So if we at all use the term there, that is only to show the height that separates supermen from men and this height is achieved not by way of any biological development but by the spiritual, which is a growth in our fundamental being. The individual human minds are the centres of consciousness, which are necessitated as the media for the manifestation of the Supreme. They are the cardinal conditions on which the world-play rests. They, under the urge of the principle immanent in the universe, have approached its possession through the dim light of social association. But society cannot be set as an end to which the individual is to be sacrificed. The individual is an end in himself but not in his egoistic self-sufficiency. The end of one individual is not antagonistic to that of another. The end is common to all and is to be promoted through cō-operation. "The right relation of the individual with the collectivity is neither to pursue egoistically his own material or mental progress or spiritual salvation without regard to his fellows nor, for the sake of community, to suppress or maim his proper development, but to sum up in himself all its best and completest possibilities and pour them out

by thought, action and all other means on his surroundings, so that the whole race may approach nearer to the attainment of its supreme personalities.'\* One, who places oneself on the path which is to lead to the plane of supermanhood, must not be anti-social. Of course, he is to transcend the ordinary moralistic outlook. But he need not be callous to the call of his fellow-beings nor be indifferent to their well-being. He will, in his procedure, pay due regard to those to whom he is related by kinship. He is for the possession of personal impersonality. He is not to be swayed by any egoistic consideration. He will let loose the light that he will receive.

Out of him will emanate ennobling ideas, elevating thoughts and actions, which will give an impetus to his fellow-brethren towards divine existence. All these he will do not by way of philanthropy but in a spirit of service. He is to realize his unity with the One. But this unity will be incomplete without his unity with the many. He will experience his unity with the universe in proportion as he experiences Divine working within him.

\* Arya, Vol. II, p. 174; Synthesis of Yoga, Introduction, III.

Both proceed *pari passu*. The former in fact is the consequence of the latter. Aurobindo, however, sometimes seems to suggest that the superman will fall short of his ideal, if he does not try to bring the whole human race to his level. "The progressive mind is seen at its noblest," says he, "when it strives to elevate the whole race to its level whether by sowing broadcast the image of its own thought and fulfilment or by changing the material life of the race into fresh forms religious, intellectual, social or political, intended to represent more nearly that ideal of truth, beauty, justice, righteousness with which the man's own soul is illumined."<sup>17</sup> The individual does not live in isolation. He, for his being, has to depend upon a social organization. "That individual perfection and liberation are not the whole sense of God's inténction in the world."<sup>18</sup> Nature herself has been making strenuous efforts to reveal progressively the truth that lies hidden in her. In the human mind, she has evolved a conscious means which will work for higher manifestation. "By Yoga must she inevitably seek to make all

<sup>17</sup> Arya, Vol. II, p. 178.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 182.

mankind fit for the higher evolution, the second birth of the spiritual existence.”<sup>19</sup>

Now in the course of evolution, the higher has developed out of the lower. But the lower on that account is not lost in the life of the higher. If the human beings have developed out of the anthropoid apes, it is not then that the latter have become automatically extinct. So if we can insist on the unity of the plan of evolution, we can very well argue that the emergence of the supermen, even as a species, will not eliminate the whole human race. Up to the stage of the human mind, Nature has worked unconsciously. But though the human individuals have become conscious, they are not equally conscious of her plan. The majority of men are either unconscious or semiconscious of the urge of spirit that is working within. It is only a few who consciously grasp it. The consummation of evolution will come forth not by the unconscious working of Nature. It is to be achieved by conscious efforts of the individuals. By any stretch of imagination, we cannot anticipate an era when the individuals of the whole human race, one and

<sup>19</sup> Arya, Vol II, p. 183.

all, will be brought at once to one and the same level of existence, at which they will become without personality impersonal channels of divine activity. Differences between individuals are many. Their respective inheritance, influence of tradition, environmental determinations and personal predilections are too complex to be cancelled all at once. They cannot be dispelled by the touch of any magic wand. "Failure in such a field matters little," says Aurobindo, "for the mere attempt is dynamic and creative."<sup>20</sup> It is not possible for a superman, nor even for a few, to mould the nature of the human race as a whole. There were Christ, Buddha, quite in recent times, our Ramkrishna was in the midst of Mankind. But these dynamic spiritual capacities could not cope with the mundane march of men. For it is only a few who keep vigil and receive the 'Bridegroom.' Aurobindo himself, as indicated above, appears to be full of misgivings, and this points to something inept in the attitude. But it may be urged that the wholesale uplift of the human race will not depend upon the activity of an individual or

<sup>20</sup> Arya, Vol. II, p. 178.

individuals. It will occur by an objective necessity inherent in Nature. There is, as we have already seen, a *nisus* in Nature, and this *nisus* is the urge of spirit for self-expression and self-revelation. The human minds are evolved as the effective means for the purpose. But there is no logical necessity whatsoever to suppose that the Supreme, at its fullest revelation, will allow an amnesty to the ego-entangled individuals. If magic prevail against logic, and the whole race casts off, all at once, the ego-created catastrophe, we shall then have no other alternative than to imagine the end of Creation which was no event in time. As Aurobindo himself insists, a yogi, after realizing the supreme end, should return upon the world, so that others may profit by his example, thought and action. But all these will not proceed out of ego-sense. He experiences his unity with the Supreme and as such becomes a conscious centre of divine activity pouring upon the world. But if the full revelation of the Divine involves the emancipation of the whole race all at once, there is no more need for the divine activity pouring upon the world, for the consummation of the cumbrous process of Creation



has already been attained, and there is no reason why the world-play should persist. The physico-vital-animal-world, with its purpose,—which serves as the basis of the human beings,—is to be withdrawn into the Maya out of which they emanated or divine activity will rush upon this remaining surd and effect a re-duplication of the selfsame process of emergence. But it is idle to assume either of these alternatives. Hence it is very difficult to follow the drift of Aurobindo when he insists on the wholesale uplift of the human race. But if we conceive his scattered writings as a coherent whole and read his books between the lines, we can perceive that this is more a matter of emphasis, and should not be construed into an articulate outlook.

Now one may not agree with Aurobindo on all the points he has elaborated, but one will not miss his message. His message is the message of the East, and especially of India, which is the birthplace of almost all the Eastern cultures and religions. He has a definite mission to mankind, and this he delivers out of his cultural inheritance and authentic yogic experience which is in fact the verification of philosophic conviction. Religion

presupposes an outlook on the world, which can be accepted as philosophy in its broader outline. So if we dive beneath the surface and look for the guiding principle of a civilization, we shall come to a definite philosophy that determines its drift. "Philosophy in the larger sense of the term," says Sir S. Radhakrishnan, "is the unseen foundation on which the structure of a civilization rests. It is the soul, which slowly builds for itself a body."<sup>21</sup> Deep spiritualism is the corner-stone of the Hindu culture. It began with the conviction as to the spiritual end of human existence and the institutions were accordingly adapted. The Ages, of course, have accumulated dross upon it. But its fundamentals are not defunct even now. The process of driving the dross has already set in. Indian thinkers and reformers have joined hands for the purpose. Hindu spiritualism in its kernel is synthetic in outlook, and its comprehensive character is derived from the philosophy at its foundation, which fixes on the fundamental truth of things. But this is not merely theoretical. It is possessed through verification by yogic experience. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the

<sup>21</sup> Kalki or the Future of Civilization, p. 37.

great Swami Vivekananda, for the first time, bore the message of Hinduism across the Atlantic. He landed on the plain of America but not as an invader to lay the foundation of a religious imperialism. He proceeded there with his mission of knowledge, love, hope and goodwill. He was the herald of an age in which the whole human race will breathe in an atmosphere of candour and cöoperation. He was not an egoist who extolled his country and culture at the expense of others. He had the insight whereby he could separate the husk from the kernel. He recognized the valuable elements of both the civilizations, oriental and occidental, and could abstract them from their accidents. He was, however, quite alive to the defects of the latter, and to the degradation of the former. He announced to the world that the 'salvation of the human race lies in the synthesis of dynamic activism of the West and pacific spiritualism of the East. Aurobindo is the brightest, and withal the most articulate, of quite a galaxy of thinkers and seers who have followed in his footprints. Now Indian scholars, poets and philosophers are busy with a salvage work in regard to their civilization, and are eager to bring forth to

the forefront the valuables which will figure as contributions to the world-synthesis. Aurobindo is unique in himself, unique in his comprehension as well as in his expressions. He does not rely merely on his knowledge of history. He draws upon his precise philosophic grasp and inner spiritual illumination. So he speaks with authority and expresses himself with eloquence. The world is at present faced with a crisis—economic, social, political and otherwise. The different nations are making strenuous efforts to eliminate it. But if the root-cause of the evil is not found out, all temporary measures will be mere makeshifts. The tide of the trouble will not be stemmed. It will reappear in new forms in fresh fields. The last European war is a great event in the history of the human race. It has brought to the conscious level the unity of the race. But it is as yet inarticulate and vague. It has been conceived only in the terms of economics, trade and commerce. The different nations of the world are the vast organizations of the egos of the individuals of the respective groups, wherein they unfold their combined force. Their outlook is mainly chauvinistic. Their attitude is not inspired by any

profound ideal. Since the war, the peoples of the world have come to recognize the value of peace. There is indeed a lot of talk about it. But peace cannot be established by any patchwork. It cannot be guaranteed by pacts and pledges. Disarmament is devised as an effective means whereby peace will be ensured. But the leaders of the nations are wrangling over this issue, for they are not approaching it with a higher motive than self-aggrandizement that lurks behind. Sincerity and goodwill are lacking. Suspicion and superciliousness are still haunting their minds. The League of Nations is a dim beginning of the far-off thing that is yet to happen on this earth. It points to an objective necessity which is working within, and also needs the conscious cōoperation of the nations of the world. But it will not come to pass by mere political covenants and economic conferences. The peace and prosperity of the world presupposes a fundamental change in the outlook. "The safety of Europe," says Aurobindo, "has to be sought in the recognition of the spiritual aim of human existence, otherwise she will be crushed by the weight of her own unilluminated knowledge and soulless organisation. The safety

of Asia lies in the recognition of the material mould and mental condition in which that aim has to be worked out, otherwise she will sink deeper into the slough of despond, of a mental and physical incompetence to deal with the facts of life, and the shocks of a rapidly changing movement." <sup>22</sup> Europe has been the venue of modern civilization. Its ideas and ideals are surging on the East, and are disturbing its social organization and institutions. The occidental ideal has captured the imagination of the youths of the Orient. But they must not be led away by the first flash. They have to maintain a poise; possessing their heritage of a spiritual culture, and culling the best elements of the western, they ought to approach the issue of reconstruction and reform. The social organization of the West is tending towards disruption. The recognition of the spiritual end of existence will turn round the individuals from their mad rush after animal instincts and impulses and will furnish elevating principles for reconstruction. The world-synthesis will ensue not by superficial associations. It has to be approached in the light of the

<sup>22</sup> Ideal and Progress, p. 61.

fundamental trend of humanity. Nothing is so injurious as religious imperialism. We have to get rid of the notion of a 'chosen people' of God, and to recognize that human nature is fundamentally the same. The Divine is immanent in the human. The whole race has to proceed with the recognition of this truth and to review all the organizations—social, political, economic and religious. But the unity of the human race is no colourless homogeneity. It is, of course, to be conceived by an "inner oneness," and not by an "external association of interests." But it, in its scope, will allow for the differences of climes and cultures. The ideal Aurobindo adumbrates is in a sense ethereal and abstract. It may appear as an enigma to those who are lacking in an illumined insight into the import of human existence. But it will undoubtedly offer an impetus to their imagination and lead them to rethink the problem of life and being, and to consider whether "man's unity and man's self-transcendence can come only by living in the spirit" or otherwise.

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## GLOSSARY.

Brahman—The Supreme Reality.

‘Chit’—“Creative-self-conscience ”

Sachchidananda—Existence-knowledge-bliss absolute.

Maya—Inscrutable power of Brahman.

Weltanschauung—World-view.

‘Neti, neti’—Not this, not this (method of rejection).

Samādhi—A supreme state of trance, which takes place as the result of high spiritual perfection.

Ramkrishna—The Master of Swami Vivekananda, a great religious personality, flourishing near Calcutta, during the second half of the 19th century. The Ramkrishna Mission has developed all over the world, centring round him as the inspiring Light. Some Europeans too have written books on his life. Amongst them the names of Max Müller and Romain Rolland are noteworthy.



Sādhaka—A spiritual aspirant.

Sādhana—Effort for spiritual perfection.

Shakti—Power.

Ananda—Delight.

Ādhāra—Container, that which embodies.

Tāmasic—~~the~~ Pertaining to ignorance.

Sannyāsis—~~the~~ Those who ~~renounce~~ the world.

